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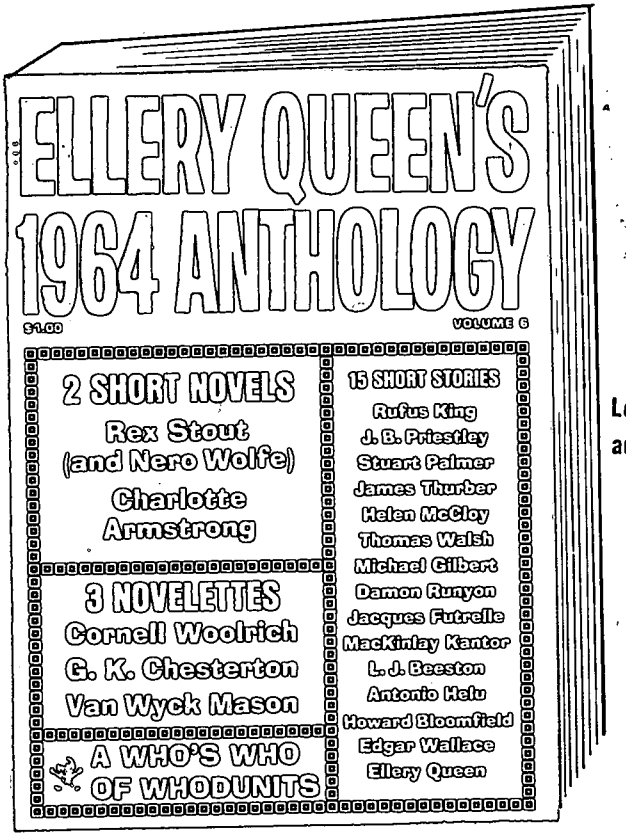


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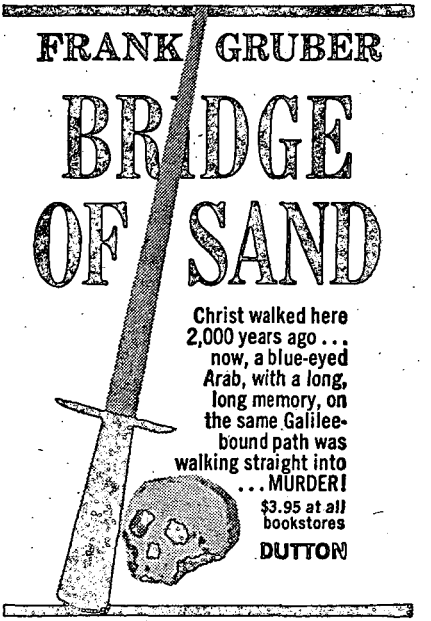

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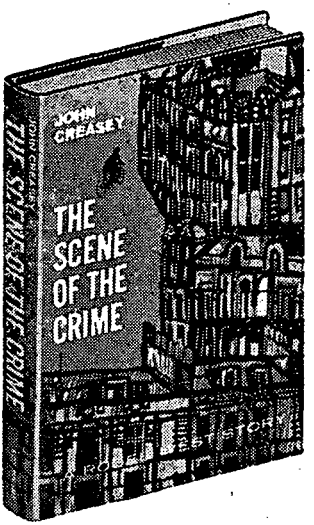


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**PUBLISHER:** *B. G. Davis* — **EDITOR:** *Ellery Queen*

*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 42, No. 5, Whole No. 240, NOV., 1963. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50¢ a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York 10022, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York 10022, N. Y. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H.* *Q1963 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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# THE CRIME OF EZECHIELE COEN

*by STANLEY ELLIN*

BEFORE THE DISENCHANTMENT SET in, Noah Freeman lived in a whirl of impressions. The chaotic traffic. The muddy Tiber. The Via Veneto out of Italian movies about *la dolce vita*. The Fountain of Trevi out of Hollywood. Castel Sant'-Angelo out of *Tosca*. Rome.

"Rome?" Pop had said. "But why Rome? Such a foreign place. And so far away."

True. But to old Pop Freeman, even Rockland County, an hour from New York, was far away, and his two weeks of vacation there every summer an adventure. And, in fact, it was unlikely that Pop had been too much surprised at his son's decision to go journeying afar. After all, this was the son who was going to be a doctor—at the very least a teacher—and who had become, of all things, a policeman.

"A policeman in the family," Pop would muse aloud now and then. "A detective with a gun in the family like on TV. My own son. What would Mama say if she ever knew, may she rest in peace?"

But, Noah had to admit, the old man had been right about one thing. Rome was far, far away, not only from New York, but also from the blood-quickening image of it instilled in young Noah Freeman when he was a schoolboy soaking himself in gaudy literature about Spartacus and Caesar and Nero. And the Pensione Alfiara, hidden away in an alley off Via Arenula, was hardly a



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place to quicken anyone's blood. It took an ill wind to blow an occasional American tourist there. In Noah's case, the ill wind was the cab driver who had picked him up at Fiumicino airport and who happened to be Signora Alfiara's brother-in-law.

It was made to order for disenchantment, the Pensione Alfiara. Granting that it offered bargain rates, its cuisine was monotonous, its service indifferent, its plumbing capricious, and its clientele, at least in early March, seemed to consist entirely of elderly, sad-eyed Italian villagers come to Rome to attend the deathbed of a dear friend. Aside from Signora Alfiara herself and the girl at the portiere's desk, no one on the scene spoke English, so communication between Noah and his fellow boarders was restricted to nods and shrugs, well meant, but useless in relieving loneliness.

Its one marked asset was the girl at the portiere's desk. She was tall and exquisite, one of the few really beautiful women Noah had yet encountered in Rome, because among other disillusionments was the discovery that Roman women are not the women one sees in Italian movies. And she lived behind her desk from early morning to late at night as if in a sad, self-contained world of her own, skillful at her accounts, polite, but remote and disinterested.

She intrigued him for more than the obvious reasons. The English she spoke was almost unaccented. If anything, it was of the clipped British variety which led him to wonder whether she might not be a Briton somehow washed up on this Roman shore. And at her throat on a fine gold chain was a Mogen David, a Star of David, announcing plainly enough that she was Jewish. The sight of that small, familiar ornament had startled him at first, then had emboldened him to make a friendly overture.

"As a fellow Jew," he had said smilingly, "I was wondering if you —" and she had cut in with chilling politeness, "Yes, you'll find the synagogue on Lungotevere dei Cenci, a few blocks south. One of the landmarks of this part of Rome. Most interesting, of course"—which was enough to send him off defeated.

After that, he regretfully put aside hopes of making her acquaintance and dutifully went his tourist way alone, the guide book to Rome in his hand, the Italian phrase book in his pocket, trying to work up a sense of excitement at what he saw, and failing dismally at it. Partly, the weather was to blame—the damp, gray March weather which promised no break in the clouds overhead. And partly, he knew, it was loneliness—the kind of feeling that made him painfully envious of the few groups of tourists he saw here and there, shepherded by an officious guide, but, at least, chattering happily to each other.

But most of all—and this was something he had to force himself to

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acknowledge—he was not a tourist, but a fugitive. And what he was trying to flee was Detective Noah Freeman, who, unfortunately, was always with him and always would be. To be one of those plump, self-satisfied, retired businessmen gaping at the dome of St. Peter's, that was one thing; to be Noah Freeman was quite another.

It was possible that Signora Alfiara, who had a pair of bright, knowing eyes buried in her pudding face, comprehended his state of mind and decided with maternal spirit to do something about it. Or it was possible that having learned his occupation she was honestly curious about him. Whatever the reason, Noah was deeply grateful the morning she sat down at the table where he was having the usual breakfast of hard roll, acid coffee, and watery marmalade, and explained that she had seen at the cinema stories about American detectives, but that he was the first she had ever met. Very interesting. And was life in America as the cinema showed it? So much shooting and beating and danger? Had he ever been shot at? Wounded, perhaps? What a way of life! It made her blood run cold to think of it.

The Signora was unprepossessing enough in her bloated shapelessness, her shabby dress and worn bedroom slippers; but, at least, she was someone to talk to, and they were a long time at breakfast settling the question of life in America. Before they left the table Noah asked about the girl at the portiere's desk. Was she Italian? She didn't sound like it when she spoke English.

"Rosanna?" said the Signora. "Oh, yes, yes, Italian. But when she was a little one—you know, when the Germans were here—she was sent to people in England. She was there many years. Oh, Italian, but *una Ebrea*, a Jew, poor sad little thing."

The note of pity rankled. "So am I," Noah said.

"Yes, she has told me," the Signora remarked, and he saw that her pity was not at all for the girl's being *una Ebrea*. More than that, he was warmed by the knowledge that the beautiful and unapproachable Rosanna had taken note of him after all.

"What makes her sad?" he asked. "The war's been over a long time."

"For some, yes. But her people will not let her forget what her father did when the Germans were here. There was the Resistance here, the partisans, you know, and her father sold them to the Germans. So they believe. Now they hate her and her brother because they are the children of a Judas."

"What do you mean, so they believe? Are they wrong about her father?"

"She says they are. To her, you understand, the father was like a saint. A man of honor and very brave. That might be. But when the Germans were here, even brave men

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were not so brave sometimes. Yet, who am I to say this about him? He was the doctor who saved my life and the life of my first son when I gave birth to him. That is why when the girl needed work I paid back a little of my debt by helping her this way. A good bargain, too. She's honest, she works hard, she speaks other languages, so I lose nothing by a little kindness."

"And what about her brother? Is he still around?"

"You see him every day. Giorgio. You know Giorgio?"

"The cleaning man?"

"He cleans, he carries, he gets drunk whenever he can, that's Georgio. Useless, really, but what can I do? For the girl's sake I make as much use of him as I can. You see the trouble with kindness? I wish to repay a debt, so now the windows are forever dirty. When you need that one he is always drunk somewhere. And always with a bad temper. His father had a bad temper, too, but at least he had great skill. As for the girl, she is an angel. But sad. That loneliness, you know, it can kill you." The Signora leaned forward inquiringly, her bosom overflowing the table. "Maybe if you would talk to her—"

"I tried to," said Noah. "She didn't seem very much interested."

"Because you are a stranger. But I have seen her watch you when you pass by. If you were a friend, perhaps. If the three of us dined together tonight—"

Signora Alfiara was someone who had her own way when she wanted to. The three of them dined together that night, but in an atmosphere of constraint, the conversation moving only under the impetus of questions the Signora aimed at Noah, Rosanna sitting silent and withdrawn as he answered.

When, while they were at their fruit and cheese, the Signora took abrupt and smiling leave of them with transparent motive, Noah said with some resentment to the girl, "I'm sorry about all this. I hope you know I wasn't the one to suggest this little party. It was the lady's idea."

"I do know that."

"Then why take out your mood on me?"

Rosanna's lips parted in surprise. "Mood? But I had no intention—believe me, it has nothing to do with you."

"What does it have to do with? Your father?" And seeing from her reaction that he had hit the mark, he said, "Yes, I heard about that."

"Heard what?"

"A little. Now you can tell me the rest. Or do you enjoy having it stuck in your throat where you can't swallow it and can't bring it up, one way or the other?"

"You must have a strange idea of enjoyment. And if you want the story, go to the synagogue, go to the ghetto or Via Catalana. You'll hear it there quick enough. Everyone knows it."

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"I might do that. First I'd like to hear your side of it."

"As a policeman? You're too late, Mr. Freeman. The case against Ezechiele Coen was decided long ago without policemen or judges."

"What case?"

"He was said to have betrayed leaders of the Resistance. That was a lie, but partisans killed him for it. They shot him and left him lying with a sign on him saying *Betrayer.* Yes, Mr. Freeman, Ezechiele Coen who preached honor to his children as the one meaningful thing in life died in dishonor. He lay there in the dirt of the Teatro Marcello a long time that day, because his own people—our people—would not give him burial. When they remember him now, they spit on the ground. I know," the girl said in a brittle voice, "because when I walk past them, they remember him."

"Then why do you stay here?"

"Because he is here. Because here is where his blackened memory—his spirit—remains, waiting for the truth to be known."

"Twenty years after the event?"

"Twenty or a hundred or a thousand. Does time change the truth, Mr. Freeman? Isn't it as important for the dead to get justice as the living?"

"Maybe it is. But how do you know that justice wasn't done in this case? What evidence is there to disprove the verdict? You were a child when all this happened, weren't you?"

"And not even in Rome. I was in England then, living with a doctor who knew my father since their school days. Yes, England is far away and I was a child then, but I knew my father."

If faith could really move mountains, Noah thought. "And what about your brother. Does he feel the way you do?"

"Giorgio tries to feel as little as he can about it. When he was a boy everyone said that some day he would be as fine a man and a doctor as his father. Now he's a drunkard. A bottle of wine makes it easy not to feel pain."

"Would he mind if I talked to him about this?"

"Why would you want to? What could Ezechiele Coen mean to you anyhow? Is Rome so boring that you must play detective here to pass the time? I don't understand you, Mr. Freeman."

"No, you don't," Noah said harshly. "But you might if you listen to what I'm going to tell you. Do you know where I got the time and money to come on a trip like this, a plain, ordinary, underpaid cop like me? Well, last year there was quite a scandal about some policemen in New York who were charged with taking graft from a gambler. I was one of them under charges. I had no part of that mess, but I was suspended from my job and when they got around to it, I was put on trial. The verdict was not guilty, I got all my back pay

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in one lump, and I was told to return to duty. Things must have looked fine for me, wouldn't you think?"

"Because you did get justice," Rosanna said.

"From the court. Only from the court. Afterward, I found that no one else really believed I was innocent. No one. Even my own father sometimes wonders about it. And if I went back on the Force, the grafters there would count me as one of them, and the honest men wouldn't trust me. That's why I'm here. Because I don't know whether to go back or not, and I need time to think, I need to get away from them all. So I did get justice, and now you tell me what good it did."

The girl shook her head somberly. "Then my father isn't the only one, is he? But you see, Mr. Freeman, you can defend your own good name. Tell me, how is he to defend his?"

That was the question which remained in his mind afterward, angry and challenging. He tried to put it aside, to fix on his own immediate problem, but there it was. It led him the next morning away from proper destinations, the ruins and remains italicized in his guide book, and on a walk southward along the Tiber.

Despite gray skies overhead and the dismally brown, turbid river sullenly locked between the stone embankments below, Noah felt a quickening pleasure in the scene. In a few days he had had his fill of sightseeing. Brick and marble and Latin inscriptions were not really the stuff of life, and pictures and statuary only dim representations of it. It was people he was hungry to meet, and now that he had an objective in meeting them he felt more alive than he had since his first day in Rome. More alive, in fact, than in all those past months in New York, working alongside his father in the old man's tailor shop. Not that this small effort to investigate the case of Ezechiele Coen would amount to anything, he knew. A matter of dredging up old and bitter memories, that was about what it came to. But the important thing was that he was Noah Freeman again, alive and functioning.

Along Lungotevere dei Cenci construction work was going on. The shells of new buildings towered over slums battered by centuries of hard wear. Midstream in the Tiber was a long, narrow island with several institutional buildings on it. Then, facing it from the embankment, the synagogue came into view, a huge, Romanesque, marble pile.

There was a railing before the synagogue. A young man leaned at his ease against the railing. Despite the chill in the air he was in shirt sleeves, his tanned, muscular arms folded on his chest, his penetrating eyes watching Noah's approach with the light of interest in them. As Noah passed, the man came to attention.

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"*Shalom.*"

"*Shalom*," Noah said, and the young man's face brightened. In his hand magically appeared a deck of picture post cards.

"Post cards, hey? See, all different of Rome. Also, the synagogue, showing the inside and the outside. You an *Americano Ebreo*, no? A *landsman?*"

"Yes," said Noah, wondering if only *Americano Ebreos* came this way. "But you can put away the pictures. I don't want any."

"Maybe a guide book? The best. Or you want a guide? The ghetto, Isola Tiberina, Teatro Marcello? Anywhere you want to go, I can show you. Two thousand lire. Ask anybody. For two thousand lire nobody is a better guide than Carlo Piperno. That's me."

"Noah Freeman, that's me. And the only place I want to go to is the rabbi's. Can I find him in the synagogue?"

"No, but I will take you to his house. Afterwards we see the ghetto, Tiberina—"

The rabbi proved to be a man of good will, of understanding; but, he explained in precise English, perhaps he could afford to be objective about the case of Ezechiele Coen because he himself was not a Roman. He had come to this congregation from Milan, an outsider. Yet, even as an outsider he could appreciate the depth of his congregation's hatred for their betrayer. A sad situation, but could they be blamed for that? Could it not be the sternest warning to all such betrayers if evil times ever came again?

"He's been dead a long time," said Noah.

"So are those whose lives he sold. Worse than that." The rabbi gestured at the shuttered window beyond which lay the Tiber. "He sold the lives of friends who were not of our faith. Those who lived in Trastevere across the river, working people, priests, who gave some of us hiding places when we needed them. Did the daughter of Ezechiele Coen tell you how, when she was a child, they helped remove her from the city at night in a cart of wine barrels, risking their lives to do it? Does she think it is easy to forget how her father rewarded them for that?"

"But why her?" Noah protested. "Why should your congregation make her an outcast? She and her brother aren't the guilty ones. Do you really believe that the sins of the fathers must be visited on the children?"

The rabbi shook his head. "There are sins, Signor Freeman, which make a horror that takes generations to wipe away. I welcome the girl and her brother to the synagogue, but I cannot wipe away the horror in the people they would meet there. If I wished to, I could not work such a miracle.

"Only a little while ago there was a great and flourishing congregation here, signore, a congregation almost as ancient as Rome itself. Do you

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know what is left of it now? A handful. A handful who cannot forget. The Jews of Rome do not forget easily. To this day they curse the name of Titus who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem as they remember kindly the name of Julius Caesar who was their friend, and for whose body they mourned seven days in the Forum. And the day they forgive Titus will be the same day they forgive Ezechiele Coen and his children and their children to come. Do you know what I mean, Signor Freeman?"

"Yes," said Noah. "I know what you mean."

He went out into the bleak, cobblestoned street, oppressed by a sense of antiquity weighing him down, of two thousand years of unrelenting history heavy on his shoulders, and not even the racketing of motor traffic along the river embankment, the spectacle of the living present, could dispel it. Carlo Piperno, the post-card vender, was waiting there.

"You have seen the rabbi? Good. Now I show you Isola Tiberina."

"Forget Isola Tiberina. There's something else I want you to show me?"

"For two thousand lire, anything."

"All right." Noah extracted the banknotes from his wallet. "Does the name Ezechiele Coen mean anything to you?"

Carlo Piperno had the hard, capable look of a man impervious to surprise. Nevertheless, he was visibly surprised. Then he recovered himself. "That one? *Mi dispiace, signore.* Sorry, but he is dead, that one." He pointed to the ground at his feet. "You want him, you have to look there for him."

"I don't want him. I want someone who knew him well. Someone who can tell me what he did and what happened to him."

"Everybody knows. I can tell you."

"No, it must be someone who wasn't a child when it happened. *Capisce?*"

"*Capisco.* But why?"

"If I answer that, it will cost you these two thousand lire. Shall I answer?"

"No, no." Carlo reached out and dexterously took possession of the money. He shrugged. "But first the rabbi, now Ezechiele Coen who is in hell long ago. Well, I am a guide, no? So now I am your guide."

He led the way through a labyrinth of narrow streets to an area not far from the synagogue, a paved area with the remains of a stone wall girdling it. Beyond the wall were tenements worn by time to the color of the clay that had gone into their brick. Yet their tenants seemed to have pride of possession. In almost every window were boxes of flowers and greenery. On steps and in stony courtyards, housewives with brushes and buckets scrubbed the stone and brick. In surrounding alleys were small stores, buzzing with activity.

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With shock Noah suddenly realized that here was the ghetto, that he was standing before a vestige of the past which thus far in his life had been only an ugly word to him. It was the presence of the wall that provided the shock, he knew. It had no gate, there was no one to prevent you from departing through it, but if it were up to him he would have had it torn down on the spot.

A strange place, Rome. Wherever you turned were the reminders of the cruel past. Memorials to man, the persecuted. This wall, the catacombs, the churches built to martyrs, the Colosseum. There was no escaping their insistent presence.

Carlo's destination turned out to be a butcher shop—the shop of Vito Levi, according to the sign over it. The butcher, a burly, gray-haired man, stood behind his chest-high marble counter hacking at a piece of meat, exchanging loud repartee with a shriveled old woman, a shawl over her head, a string bag in her hand, waiting for her order. While Carlo was addressing him he continued to chop away with the cleaver, then suddenly placed it on the counter, and came around to meet Noah in the street, wiping his hands on his apron as he came. The old woman followed, peering at Noah with beady-eyed interest, and in another minute others from the street were gathering around, getting the news from her. Ezechiele Coen may have been dead twenty years, Noah thought, but his name was still very much alive in these quarters.

He was not sorry that the matter was going to be discussed in public this way. As a young patrolman on the beat he had learned not to be too quick to break up a crowd around an accident or crime; there might be someone in the crowd who had something to say worth hearing. Now he gathered from the heat of discussion around him that everyone here had something to say about Ezechiele Coen.

With Carlo serving as interpreter, he put his questions first to Levi the butcher, and then to anyone else who volunteered information. Slowly, piece by piece, the picture of Ezechiele Coen and his crime took shape. It was Levi who supplied most of the information—the time, the place, the event.

The butcher had known Ezechiele Coen well. Like all others he had trusted him, because no man had a greater reputation for honesty than the doctor. He was a great doctor, a man of science; yet he was a man of God, too, devout, each morning binding on his phylacteries and saying his prayers, each sabbath attending the synagogue. Not that there was any gentleness in him. He was a proud man, an arrogant man, a man who would insult you to your face for the least offense. After all, it was one thing to be honest, but it was something else again to behave as if you were the only honest man in the world. The only one on earth who

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would never compromise with truth. That was Ezechiele Coen. You might trust him, but you could not like him. He was too good for that.

Then the trust was betrayed. Over the years one had learned to live with Il Duce, but when the Germans came to Rome, the Resistance of a generation ago reawoke. Sabotage, spying, a hidden press turning out leaflets which told the truth about Il Duce and his ally. Many said it was useless, but Vito Levi, the butcher, and a few others continued their secret efforts, knowing they had nothing to lose. Jews were being deported now, were being shipped to the Nazi slaughter pens in carloads. What else to do then but join some of their Gentile neighbors in the Resistance?

"Ask him," said Noah to Carlo, "if Ezechiele Coen was one of the Resistance," and when Carlo translated this, the butcher shook his head.

Only once was the doctor called on to help. Three leaders of the Resistance had managed to get into Rome from the mountains—to help organize the movement here, to give it leadership. They were hidden in a cellar in Trastevere, across the river, one of them badly wounded. The doctor's son, only a boy then, no more than fifteen years of age, was a courier for the partisans. He had brought his father to attend the wounded man, and then, soon after, the three men together were captured in their hiding place by the Germans. They had been betrayed by the honest, the noble, the righteous Ezechiele Coen.

"Ask him how he knows this?" Noah demanded of Carlo. "Was there a confession?"

There was no need for one, as it happened. There was no need for any more evidence than the money case of Major von Grubbner.

Noah silently cursed the tedious process of translation. Carlo Piperno was the kind of interpreter who richly enjoys and intends to get the maximum effect from his role. It took him a long time to make clear who and what Major von Grubbner was.

The Major was one of the men assigned to the Panzer division quartered along the Tiber. But unlike the German officers around him, Major von Grubbner was cunning as a fox, smooth in his manner, ingratiating in his approach. Others came with a gun in their hands. He came with an attaché case, a black leather case with a handsome gold ornament on it, a doubleheaded eagle which was a reminder of the great name of his family. And in the case was money. Bundles of money. Packages of lire, fresh and crisp, a fortune by any estimate.

Give the devil his due. This von Grubbner was a brave man as well as a cunning one. He walked alone, contemptuous of those who needed guards to attend them, the money case in his hand, a smile on his lips, and he invited confidences.

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"After all," he would say, "we are businessmen, you and I. We are practical people who dislike trouble. Remove the troublemakers and all is peaceful, no? Well, here I am to do business. Look at this money. Beautiful, isn't it? And all you have to do is name your own price, expose the troublemakers, and we are all happy. Name your own price, that's all you have to do."

And he would open the case under your nose, showing you the money, fondling it, offering it to you. It was more than money. It was life itself. It could buy the few scraps of food remaining to be bought, it could buy you a refuge for your wife and children, it could buy you safety for another day. Life itself. Everyone wants life, and there it was in that little black leather case with the doubleheaded eagle in gold marking it.

Only one man was tempted. The day after the three partisans were taken, Ezechiele Coen was seen fleeing with that case through the alleys, running like a rabbit before the hounds of vengeance he knew would soon be on him. Only Ezechiele Coen, the devout, the honorable, the arrogant, fell, and died soon for his treachery.

Vito Levi's words needed translation, but not the emotion behind them. And the crowd around Noah, now staring at him in silence, did not need its feelings explained. Yet, the story seemed incomplete to him, to Detective Noah Freeman, who had learned at his job not to live by generalities. The evidence, that was what had meaning.

"Ask them," he said to Carlo, "who saw Ezechiele Coen with that case in his possession," and when Carlo translated this, Levi drove a thumb hard into his own chest. Then he looked around the crowd and pointed, and a man on its outskirts raised his hand, a woman nearby raised hers, someone else raised a hand.

Three witnesses, four, five. Enough, Noah thought, to hang any man. With difficulty, prompting Carlo question by question, he drew their story from them. They lived in houses along Via del Portico. It was hot that night, a suffocating heat that made sleep impossible. One and all, they were at their windows. One and all, they saw the doctor running down the street toward the Teatro Marcello, the leather case under his arm. His medical bag? No, no. Not with the golden eagle on it. It was the doctor with his blood money. This they swore on the lives of their children.

During siesta time that afternoon, Noah, with the connivance of Signora Alfiara, drew Rosanna out of doors for a walk to a café in the Piazza Navona. Over glasses of Campari he told her the results of his investigation.

"Witnesses," she said scathingly. "Have you found that witnesses always tell the truth?"

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"These people do. But sometimes there can be a difference between what you imagine is the truth and the truth itself."

"And how do you discover that difference?"

"By asking more questions. For example, did your father live in the ghetto?"

"During the war, yes."

"And according to my street map the Teatro Marcello is outside it. Why would he be running there with the money instead of keeping it safe at home? Even more curious, why would he carry the money in that case, instead of transferring it to something that couldn't be identified? And why would he be given that case, a personal possession, along with the money? You can see how many unanswered questions come up, if you look at all this without prejudice."

"Then you think—"

"I don't think anything yet. First, I want to try to get answers to those questions. I want to establish a rational pattern for what seems to be a whole irrational set of events. And there is one person who can help me do this."

"Who?"

"Major von Grubbner himself."

"But how would you ever find him? It was so long ago. He may be dead."

"Or he may not be. If he is not, there are ways of finding him."

"But it would mean so much trouble. So much time and effort."

The way she was looking at him then, Noah thought, was more than sufficient payment for the time and effort. And the way she flushed when he returned her look told him that she knew his thought.

"I'm used to this kind of effort," he said. "Anyhow, it may be the last chance I'll have to practise my profession."

"Then you're not going back to your work with the police? But you're a very good detective. You are, aren't you?"

"Oh, very good. And," he said, "honest, too, despite the popular opinion."

"Don't say it like that," she flashed out angrily. "You are honest. I know you are."

"Do you? Well, that makes two of us at least. Anyhow, the vital thing is for me to locate von Grubbner if he's still somewhere to be found. After that, we'll see. By the way, do you know the date when all this happened? When your father was seen with that case?"

"Yes. It was the fifth of July in 1943. I couldn't very well forget that date, Mr. Freeman."

"Noah."

"Of course," said Rosanna. "Noah."

After returning her to her desk at the pensione, Noah went directly to police headquarters. There he found his credentials an open sesame. In the end he was closeted with Commissioner Ponziani, a handsome

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urbane man, who listened to the story of Ezechiele Coen with fascination. At its conclusion he raised quizzical eyebrows at Noah.

"And your interest in this affair?"

"Purely unofficial. I don't even know if I have the right to bother you with it at all." Noah shrugged. "But when I thought of all the red tape to cut if I went to the military or consular authorities—"

The Commissioner made a gesture which dismissed as beneath contempt the clumsy workings of the military and consular authorities. "No, no, you did right to come here. We are partners in our profession, are we not, signore? We are of a brotherhood, you and I. So now if you give me all possible information about this Major von Grubbner, I will communicate with the German police. We shall soon learn if there is anything they can tell us about him."

Soon meant days of waiting, and, Noah saw, they were bad days for Rosanna. Each one that passed left her more tense, more dependent on him for reassurance. How could anyone ever find this German, one man in millions, a man who might have his own reasons for not wanting to be found? And if by some miracle they could confront him, what would he have to say? Was it possible that he would say her father had been guilty?

"It is," said Noah. He reached out and took her hand comfortingly. "You have to be prepared for that."

"I will not be! No, I will not be," she said fiercely. Then her assurance crumpled. "He would be lying, wouldn't he? You know he would." The passage left Noah shaken. Rosanna's intensity, the way she had clutched his hand like a lost child—these left him wondering if he had not dangerously overreached himself in trying to exorcise the ghost of Ezechiele Coen. If he failed, it would leave things worse than ever. Worse for himself, too, because now he realized with delight and misery that he was falling hopelessly in love with the girl. And so much seemed to depend on clearing her father's reputation. Could it be, as Rosanna felt, that Ezechiele Coen's spirit really waited here on the banks of the Tiber to be set at rest? And what if there were no way of doing that?

When Signora Alfiara called him to the phone to take a message from the police, Noah picked up the phone almost prayerfully.

"*Pronto*," he said, and Commissioner Ponziani said without preliminary, "Ah, Signor Freeman. This affair of Major von Grubbner becomes stranger and stranger. Will you meet with me in my office so that we may discuss it?"

At the office the Commissioner came directly to the point.

"The date of the unhappy event we are concerned with," he said, "was the fifth of July in 1943. Is that correct?"

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"It is," said Noah.

"And here," said the Commissioner, tapping a finger on the sheet of paper before him, "is the report of the German authorities on a Major Alois von Grubbner, attached to the Panzer division stationed in Rome at that time. According to the report he deserted the army, absconding with a large amount of military funds, on the sixth of July in 1943. No trace of him has been discovered since."

The Commissioner leaned back in his chair and smiled at Noah. "Interesting, no? Very interesting. What do you make of it?"

"He didn't desert," said Noah. "He didn't abscond. That was the money seen in Ezechiele Coen's possession."

"So I believe, too. I strongly suspect that this officer was murdered —assassinated may be a more judicious word, considering the circumstances—and the money taken from him."

"But his body," Noah said. "Wouldn't the authorities have allowed for possible murder and made a search for it?"

"A search was made. But Major von Grubbner, it seems, had a somewhat—" the Commissioner twirled a finger in the air, seeking the right word "—a somewhat shady record in his civilian life. A little embezzling here, a little forgery there—enough to make his superiors quickly suspect his integrity when he disappeared. I imagine their search was a brief one. But I say that if they had been able to peer beneath the Tiber—"

"Is that where you think he ended up?"

"There, or beneath some cellar, or in a hole dug in a dark corner. Yes, I know what you are thinking Signor Freeman. A man like this Doctor Ezechiele Coen hardly seems capable of assassination, robbery, the disposal of a body. Still, that is not much of an argument to present to people violently antagonistic to his memory. It is, at best, a supposition. Fevered emotions are not be cooled by suppositions. I very much fear that your investigation has come to an abrupt and unhappy ending."

Noah shook his head. "That attaché case and the money in it," he said. "It was never found. I was told that when Ezechiele Coen was found shot by partisans and left lying in the Teatro Marcello, the case was nowhere to be seen. What happened to it?"

The Commissioner shrugged. "Removed by those who did the shooting, of course."

"If it was there to be removed. But no one ever reported seeing it then or afterward. No one ever made a remark—even after the war when it would be safe to—that money intended to be used against the Resistance was used by it. But don't you think that this is the sort of thing that would be a standing joke—a folk story—among these people?"

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"Perhaps. Again it is no more than a supposition."

"And since it's all I have to go on, I'll continue from there."

"You are a stubborn man, Signor Freeman." The Commissioner shook his head with grudging admiration. "Well, if you need further assistance, come to me directly. Very stubborn. I wish some of my associates had your persistence."

When Rosanna had been told what occurred in the Commissioner's office she was prepared that instant to make the story public.

"It is proof, isn't it?" she demanded. "Whatever did happen, we know my father had no part in it. Isn't that true?"

"You and I know. But remember one thing: your father was seen with that attaché case. Until that can be explained, nothing else will stand as proof of his innocence."

"He may have found the case. That's possible, isn't it?"

"Hardly possible," Noah said. "And why would he be carrying it toward the Teatro Marcello? What is this Teatro Marcello anyhow?"

"Haven't you seen it yet? It's one of the ruins like the Colosseum, but smaller."

"Can you take me there now?"

"Not now. I can't leave the desk until Signora Alfiara returns. But it's not far from here. A little distance past the synagogue on the Via del Portico. Look for number 39. You'll find it easily."

Outside the pensione Noah saw Giorgio Coen unloading a delivery of food from a truck. He was, at a guess, ten years older than his sister, a big, shambling man with good features that had gone slack with dissipation, and a perpetual stubble of beard on his jowls. Despite the flabby look of him, he hoisted a side of meat to his shoulder and bore it into the building with ease. In passing, he looked at Noah with a hangdog, beaten expression, and Noah could feel for him. Rosanna had been cruelly wounded by the hatred vented against her father, but Giorgio had been destroyed by it. However this affair turned out, there was small hope of salvaging anything from those remains.

Noah walked past the synagogue, found the Via del Portico readily enough, and then before the building marked 39 he stood looking around in bewilderment. There was no vestige of any ruin resembling the Colosseum here—no ruin at all, in fact. Number 39 itself was only an old apartment house, the kind of apartment house so familiar to rundown sections of Manhattan back home.

He studied the names under the doorbells outside as if expecting to find the answer to the mystery there, then peered into its tiled hallway. A buxom girl, a baby over her shoulder, came along the hallway, and Noah smiled at her.

"Teatro Marcello?" he said doubtfully. "*Dove?*"

She smiled back and said some-

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thing incomprehensible to him, and when he shook his head she made a circling gesture with her hand.

"Oh, in back," Noah said. "Thank you. *Grazie.*"

It was in back. And it was, Noah decided, one of the more incredible spectacles of this whole incredible city. The Teatro Marcello fitted Rosanna's description: it was the grim gray ruin of a lesser Colosseum. But into it had been built the apartment house, so that only the semicircle of ruins visible from the rear remained in their original form.

The tiers of stone blocks, of columns, of arches towering overhead were Roman remains, and the apartment house was a façade for them, concealing them from anyone standing before the house. Even the top tier of this ancient structure had been put to use, Noah saw. It had been bricked and windowed, and behind some of the windows shone electric lights. People lived there. They walked through the tiled hallway leading from the street, climbed flights of stairs, and entered kitchens and bedrooms whose walls had been built by Imperial slaves two thousand years ago. Incredible, but there it was before him.

An immense barren field encircled the building, a wasteland of pebbly earth and weeds. Boys were playing football there, deftly booting the ball back and forth. On the trunks of marble columns half sunk into the ground, women sat and tended baby carriages. Nearby, a withered crone spread out scraps of meat on a piece of newspaper, and cats—the tough-looking, pampered cats of Rome—circled the paper hungrily, waiting for the signal to begin lunch.

Noah tried to visualize the scene twenty years before when Ezechiele Coen had fled here in the darkness bearing an attaché case marked with a doubleheaded eagle. He must have had business here, for here was where he lingered until an avenging partisan had searched him out and killed him. But what business? Business with whom? No one in the apartment house; there seemed to be no entrance to it from this side.

At its ground level, the Teatro Marcello was a series of archways, the original entrances to the arena within. Noah walked slowly along them. Each archway was barred by a massive iron gate beyond which was a small cavern solidly bricked, impenetrable at any point. Behind each gate could be seen fragments of columns, broken statuary of heads and arms and robed bodies, a litter of filthy paper blown in by the winds of time. Only in one of those musty caverns could be seen signs of life going on. Piled on a slab of marble were schoolbooks, coats, and sweaters, evidently the property of the boys playing football, placed here for safety's sake.

For safety's sake. With a sense of mounting excitement, Noah studied the gate closely. It extended from the floor almost to the top of the archway. Its iron bars were too close

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together to allow even a boy to slip between them, its lock massive and solidly caked with rust the chain holding t as heavy as a small anchor chain. Impossible to get under, over, or through it—yet the boys had. Magic. Could someone else have used that magic on a July night twenty years ago?

When Noah called to them, the boys took their time about stopping their game, and then came over to the gate warily. By dint of elaborate gestures, Noah managed to make his questions clear, but it took a package of cigarettes and a handful of coins to get the required demonstration.

One of the boys, grinning, locked his hands around a bar of the gate and with an effort raised it clear of its socket in the horizontal rod supporting it near the ground. Now it was held only by the cross rod overhead. The boy drew it aside at an angle and slipped through the space left. He returned, dropped the bar back into place, and held out a hand for another cigarette.

With the help of the Italian phrase book, Noah questioned the group around him. How long had these locked gates been here? The boys scratched their head and looked at each other. A long time. Before they could remember. Before their fathers could remember. A very long time.

And how long had that one bar been loose, so that you could go in and out if you knew the secret? The same. All the *ragazzi* around here knew about it as their fathers had before them.

Could any other of these gates be entered this way? No, this was the only one. The good one.

When he had dismissed them by showing empty hands—no more cigarettes, no more coins—Noah sat down on one of the sunken marble columns near the women and their baby carriages, and waited. It took a while for the boys to finish their game and depart, taking their gear with them, but finally they were gone. Then Noah entered the gate, using his newfound secret, and started a slow, methodical investigation of what lay in the shadowy reaches beyond it.

He gave no thought to the condition of his hands or clothes, but carefully pushed aside the litter of paper, probed under and between the chunks of marble, all the broken statuary around him. At the far end of the cavern he found that once he had swept the litter aside there was a clear space underfoot. Starting at the wall, he inched forward on his knees, sweeping his fingers lightly back and forth over the ground. Then his fingertips hit a slight depression in the flinty earth, an almost imperceptible concavity. Despite the chill in the air, he was sweating now, and had to pull out a handkerchief to mop his brow.

He traced the depression, his fingertips moving along it, following it to its length, turning where it turned, marking a rectangle the

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length and width of a man's body. Once before, in the course of his official duties, Detective Noah Freeman had marked a rectangle like this in the weed-grown yard of a Bronx shanty, and had found beneath it what he had expected to find. He knew he would not be disappointed in what would be dug up from this hole beneath the Teatro Marcello. He was tempted to get a tool and do the digging himself, but that, of course, must be the job of the police. And before they would be notified, the pieces of the puzzle, all at hand now, must be placed together before a proper witness . . .

When Noah returned to the Pensione Alfiara, he brought with him as witness the rabbi, bewildered by the unexplained urgency of this mission, out of breath at the quick pace Noah had set through the streets. Rosanna was at her desk. She looked with alarm at Noah's grimy hands, at the streaks of dirt and sweat on his face. For the rabbi she had no greeting. This was the enemy, an unbeliever in the cause of Ezechiele Coen. She had eyes only for Noah.

"What happened?" she said. "What's wrong? Are you hurt?"

"No. Listen, Rosanna, have you told Giorgio anything about von Grubbner? About my meeting with the police commissioner?"

"No."

"Good. Where is he now?"

"Giorgio? In the kitchen, I think. But why? What—?"

"If you come along, you'll see why. But you're not to say anything. Not a word, do you understand. Let me do all the talking."

Giorgio was in the kitchen listlessly moving a mop back and forth over the floor. He stopped when he saw his visitors, and regarded them with bleary bewilderment. Now is the time, Noah thought. It must be done quickly and surely now, or it will never be done at all.

"Giorgio," he said, "I have news for you. Good news. Your father did not betray anyone."

Resentment flickered in the bleary eyes. "I have always known that, signore. But why is it your concern?"

"He never betrayed anyone, Giorgio. But you did."

Rosanna gasped. Giorgio shook his head pityingly. "Listen to him! *Basta, signore. Basta.* I have work to do."

"You did your work a long time ago," Noah said relentlessly. "And when your father took away the money paid to you for it, you followed him and killed him to get it back."

He was pleased to see that Giorgio did not reel under this wholly false accusation. Instead, he seemed to draw strength from it. This is the way, Noah thought, that the unsuspecting animal is lured closer and closer to the trap. What hurt was that Rosanna, looking back and forth from inquisitor to accused, seemed ready to collapse. The rabbi watched with the same numb horror.

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Giorgio turned to them. "Do you hear this?" he demanded, and there was a distinct mockery in his voice. "Now I am a murderer. Now I killed my own father."

"Before a witness," Noah said softly.

"Oh, of course, before a witness. And who was that witness, signore?"

"Someone who has just told the police everything. They'll bring him here very soon, so that he can point you out to them. A Major von Grubbner."

"And that is the worst lie of all!" said Giorgio triumphantly. "He's dead, that one! Dead and buried, do you hear? So all your talk —!"

There are animals which, when trapped, will fight to the death for their freedom, will gnaw away one of their own legs to release themselves. There are others which go to pieces the instant the jaws of the trap have snapped on them, become quivering lumps of flesh waiting only for the end. Giorgio, Noah saw, was one of the latter breed. His voice choked off, his jaw went slack, his face ashen. The mop, released from his nerveless grip, fell with a clatter. Rosanna took a step toward him, but Noah caught her wrist, holding her back.

"How do you know he's dead, Giorgio?" he demanded. "Yes, he's dead and buried—but how did you know that? No one else knew. How do you happen to be the only one?"

The man swayed, fell back against the wall.

"You killed von Grubbner and took that money," Noah said. "When your father tried to get rid of it, the partisans held him guilty of informing and shot him while you stood by, refusing to tell them the truth. In a way, you did help kill him, didn't you? That's what you've been carrying around in you since the day he died, isn't it?"

"Giorgio!" Rosanna cried out. "But why didn't you tell them? Why? Why?"

"Because," said Noah, "then they would have known the real informer. That money was a price paid to you for information, wasn't it, Giorgio?"

The word emerged like a groan. "Yes."

"You?" Rosanna said wonderingly, her eyes fixed on her brother. "It was you?"

"But what could I do? What could I do? He came to me, the German. He said he knew I was of the Resistance. He said if I did not tell him where the men were hidden I would be put to death. If I told, I would be saved. I would be rewarded."

The broken hulk lurched toward Rosanna, arms held wide in appeal, but Noah barred the way. "Why did you kill von Grubbner?"

"Because he cheated me. After the men were taken, I went to him for the money, and he laughed at me. He said I must tell him about others, too. I must tell everything, and then he would pay. So I killed him. When he turned away, I picked up a stone

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and struck him on the head and then again and again until he was dead. And I buried him behind the gate there because only the *ragazzi* knew how to get through it, and no one would find him there."

"But you took that case full of money with you."

"Yes, but only to give to my father. And I told him everything. Everything. I swear it. I wanted him to beat me. I wanted him to kill me if that would make it all right. But he would not. All he knew was that the money must be returned. He had too much honor! That was what he died for. He was mad with honor! Who else on this earth would try to return money to a dead man?"

Giorgio's legs gave way. He fell to his knees and remained there, striking the floor blow after blow with his fist. "Who else?" he moaned "Who else?"

The rabbi looked helplessly at Noah. "He was a boy then," he said in a voice of anguish. "Only a boy. Can we hold children guilty of the crimes we inflict on them?" And then he said with bewilderment, "But what of the blood money? What did Ezechiele Coen do with it? What became of it?"

"I think we'll soon find out," said Noah.

They were all there at the gates of the Teatro Marcello when Commissioner Ponziani arrived with his men. All of them and more. The rabbi and Carlo Piperno, the postcard vender, and Vito Levi, the butcher, and a host of others whose names were inscribed on the roles of the synagogue. And tenants of the Teatro Marcello, curious as to what was going on below them, and schoolboys and passersby with time to spare.

The Commissioner knew his job, Noah saw. Not only had he brought a couple of strong young *carabinieri* to perform the exhumation, but other men as well to hold back the excited crowd.

Only Giorgio was not there. Giorgio was in a bed of the hospital on Isola Tiberina, his face turned to the wall. He was willing himself to die, the doctor had said, but he would not die. He would live, and, with help, make use of the years ahead. It was possible that employment in the hospital itself, work which helped the unfortunate, might restore to him a sense of his own worth. The doctor would see to that when the time came.

Noah watched as the police shattered the lock on the gates and drew them apart, their hinges groaning rustily. He put an arm around Rosanna's waist and drew her to him as the crowd pressed close behind them. This was all her doing, he thought. Her faith had moved mountains, and with someone like this at his side, someone whose faith in him would never waver, it would not be hard to return home and face down the cynics there. It didn't take a majority vote of confidence

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to sustain you; it needed only one person's granite faith.

The police strung up lights in the vaulted area behind the gate. They studied the ground, then carefully plied shovels as the Commissioner hovered around them.

"*Faccia attenzione*," he said. "*Adagio. Adagio.*"

The mound of dirt against the wall grew larger. The men put aside their shovels. Kneeling, they carefully scooped earth from the hole, handful by handful. Then the form of a body showed, fleshless bones, a grinning shattered skull. A body clad in the moldering tatters of a military uniform.

And, as Noah saw under the glare of droplights, this was not the first time these remains had been uncovered. On the chest of the skeletal form rested a small leather case fallen to rot, marked by the blackened image of a doubleheaded eagle. The case had come apart at all its seams, the money in it seemed to have melted together in lumps, more like clay than money, yet it was clearly recognizable for what it was. Twenty years ago Ezechiele Coen had scraped aside the earth over the freshly buried Major Alois von Grubbner and returned his money to him. There it was and there he was, together as they had been since that time.

Noah became aware of the rabbi's voice behind him. Then another voice and another, all merging into a litany recited in deep-toned chorus. A litany, Noah thought, older than the oldest ruins of Rome. It was the *kaddish*, the Hebrew prayer for the dead, raised to heaven for Ezechiele Coen, now at rest.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR: | **AGATHA CHRISTIE** |
| TITLE: | ***The Theft of the Opalsen Pearls*** |
| TYPE: | Detective Story |
| DETECTIVE: | Hercule Poirot |
| LOCALE: | Brighton, England |
| TIME: | The Present |
| COMMENTS: | *Hastings invited Poirot to spend a quiet week-end at the seashore. But the week-end did not go according to plan. It proved to be a bus(iness)man's holiday.* |

"POIROT," I SAID, "A CHANGE OF AIR would do you good."

"You think so, *mon ami*?"

"I am sure of it."

"Eh—eh?" said my friend, smiling. "It is all arranged, then?"

"You will come?"

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"Brighton. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine in the City put me on to a very good thing, and—well, I have money to burn, as the saying goes. I think a week-end at the Grand Metropolitan would do us all the good in the world."

"Thank you, I accept most gratefully. You have the good heart to think of an old man. And the good heart, it is in the end worth all the little gray cells. Yes, yes, I who speak to you am in danger of forgetting that sometimes."

I did not quite relish the implication. I fancy that Poirot is sometimes a little inclined to underestimate my mental capacities. But his pleasure was so evident that I put my slight annoyance aside.

Saturday evening saw us dining at the Grand Metropolitan in the midst of a gay throng. All the world and his wife seemed to be at Brighton. The dresses were marvelous, and the jewels—worn sometimes with more love of display than good taste—were something magnificent.

"*Hein,* it is a sight, this!" murmured Poirot. "This is the home of

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the profiteer, is it not so, Hastings?"

"Supposed to be," I replied. "But we'll hope they aren't all tarred with the profiteering brush."

Poirot gazed round him placidly.

"The sight of so many jewels makes me wish I had turned my brains to crime instead of to its detection. What a wonderful opportunity for some thief of distinction! Regard, Hastings, that stout woman by the pillar. She is, as you would say, plastered with gems."

I followed his eyes.

"Why," I exclaimed, "it's Mrs. Opalsen."

"You know her?"

"Slightly. Her husband is a rich stockbroker who made a fortune in the recent oil boom."

After dinner we ran across the Opalsens in the lounge, and I introduced Poirot to them. We chatted for a few minutes, and ended by having our coffee together.

Poirot said a few words in praise of some of the showier gems displayed on the lady's ample bosom, and she brightened up at once.

"It's a perfect hobby of mine, Mr. Poirot. I just *love* jewelry. Ed knows my weakness, and every time things go well he brings me something new. You are interested in precious stones?"

"I have had a good deal to do with them one time and another, madame. My profession has brought me into contact with some of the most famous jewels in the world."

He went on to narrate, with discreet pseudonyms, the story of the historic jewels of a reigning house, and Mrs. Opalsen listened with bated breath.

"There now!" she exclaimed, as he ended. "If it isn't just like a play! You know, I've got some pearls of my own that have a history attached to them. I believe it's supposed to be one of the finest necklaces in the world—pearls so beautifully matched and so perfect in color. I declare I really must run up and get it!"

"Oh, madame," protested Poirot, "you are too amiable. Pray do not derange yourself!"

"Ah, but I'd like to show it to you."

The buxom dame waddled across to the lift briskly enough. Her husband, who had been talking to me, looked at Poirot inquiringly.

"Madame your wife is so amiable as to insist on showing me her pearl necklace," explained the latter.

"Oh, the pearls!" Opalsen smiled in a satisfied fashion. "Well, they *are* worth seeing. Cost a pretty penny too! Still, the money's there all right; I could get what I paid for them any day—perhaps more. May have to, too, if things go on as they are now. Money's confoundedly tight in the City. All this infernal E.P.D." He rambled on, launching into technicalities where I could not follow him.

He was interrupted by a small page-boy who approached and mur-

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mured something in his ear.

"Eh—what? I'll come at once. Not taken ill, is she? Excuse me, gentlemen."

He left us abruptly; Poirot leaned back and lit one of his tiny Russian cigarettes. Then, carefully and meticulously, he arranged the empty coffee cups in a neat row, and beamed happily on the result.

The minutes passed. The Opalsens did not return.

"Curious," I remarked, at length. "I wonder when they will come back."

Poirot watched the ascending spirals of smoke, and then said thoughtfully, "They will not come back."

"Why?"

"Because, my friend, something has happened."

"What sort of thing? How do you know?" I asked curiously.

Poirot smiled.

"A few moments ago the manager came hurriedly out of his office and ran upstairs. He was much agitated. The lift-boy is deep in talk with one of the pages. The lift-bell has rung three times, but he heeds it not. Thirdly, even the waiters are *distrait;* and to make a waiter *distrait—*" Poirot shook his head with an air of finality. "The affair must indeed be of the first magnitude. Ah, it is as I thought! Here come the police."

Two men had just entered the hotel—one in uniform, the other in plain clothes. They spoke to a page and were immediately ushered upstairs. A few minutes later, the same boy descended and came up to where we were sitting.

"Mr. Opalsen's compliments, and would you please step upstairs."

Poirot sprang nimbly to his feet. One would have said that he awaited the summons. I followed with no less alacrity.

The Opalsens' apartment was situated on the third floor. After knocking on the door, the page-boy retired, and we answered the summons, "Come in!"

A strange scene met our eyes. The room was Mrs. Opalsen's bedroom, and in the center of it, lying back in an armchair, was the lady herself, weeping violently. She presented an extraordinary spectacle, with tears making great furrows in the powder with which her complexion was liberally coated.

Mr. Opalsen was striding up and down angrily. The two police officials stood in the middle of the room, one with a notebook in hand. A chambermaid, looking frightened to death, stood by the fireplace; and on the other side of the room a Frenchwoman, obviously Mrs. Opalsen's maid, was weeping and wringing her hands, with an intensity of grief that rivaled that of her mistress.

Into this pandemonium stepped Poirot, neat and smiling. Immediately, with an energy surprising in one of her bulk, Mrs. Opalsen sprang from her chair.

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"There now; Ed may say what he likes, but I believe in luck, I do. It was fated I should meet you the way I did this evening, and I've a feeling that if you can't get my pearls back for me nobody can."

"Calm yourself, madame." Poirot patted her hand soothingly. "Reassure yourself. All will be well. Hercule Poirot will aid you!"

Mr. Opalsen turned to the police inspector.

"There will be no objection to my—er—calling in this gentleman, I suppose?"

"None at all, sir," replied the man civilly, but with complete indifference. "Perhaps now your lady's feeling better she'll just let us have the facts?"

Mrs. Opalsen looked helplessly at Poirot. He led her back to her chair.

"Seat yourself, madame, and recount to us the whole history without agitating yourself."

Mrs. Opalsen dried her eyes gingerly, and began. "I came upstairs after dinner to fetch my pearls for Mr. Poirot here to see. The chambermaid and Célestine were both in the room as usual—"

"Excuse me, madame, but what do you mean by 'as usual'?"

Mr. Opalsen explained. "I make it a rule that no one is to come into this room unless Célestine is there also. The chambermaid does the room in the morning while Célestine is present, and comes in after dinner to turn down the beds under the same conditions; otherwise the chambermaid never enters the room."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Opalsen, "I came up. I went to the drawer here,"—she indicated the bottom right-hand drawer of the dressing-table—"took out my jewel case and unlocked it. It seemed quite as usual—but the pearls were not there!"

The Inspector had been busy with his notebook. "When had you last seen them?" he asked.

"They were there when I went down to dinner."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure. I was uncertain whether to wear them or not, but in the end I decided on the emeralds, and put the pearls back in the jewel case."

"Who locked up the jewel case?"

"I did. I wear the key on a chain round my neck." She held it up as she spoke.

The Inspector examined it, and shrugged. "The thief must have had a duplicate key. No difficult matter. The lock is quite a simple one. What did you do after you'd locked the jewel case?"

"I put it back in the bottom drawer where I always keep it."

"You didn't lock the drawer?"

"No, I never do. My maid remains in the room till I come up, so there's no need."

The Inspector's face grew graver.

"Am I to understand that the jewels were there when you went

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down to dinner, and that since then *the maid has not left the room?"*

Suddenly, as though the horror of her own situation burst on her for the first time, Célestine uttered a piercing shriek, and flinging herself on Poirot, poured out a torrent of incoherent French.

The suggestion was infamous! That she should be suspected of robbing Madame! The police were well known to be of a stupidity incredible! But Monsieur, who was a Frenchman—

"A Belgian," interjected Poirot, but Célestine paid no attention.

Monsieur would not stand by and see her falsely accused, while that infamous chambermaid was allowed to go scot-free. She had never liked her—a bold, red-faced thing—a born thief. She had said from the first that she was not honest. And had kept a sharp watch over her too, when she was doing Madame's room! Let those idiots of policemen search her, and if they did not find Madame's pearls on her it would be very surprising!

Although this harangue was uttered in rapid French, Célestine had interlarded it with a wealth of gesture, and the chambermaid realized at least a part of her meaning. She reddened angrily.

"If that foreign woman's saying I took the pearls, it's a lie!" she declared heatedly. "I never so much as saw them."

"Search her!" screamed the other. "You will find it as I say."

"You're a liar—do you hear?" said the chambermaid, advancing on her. "Stole 'em yourself, and want to put it on me. Why, I was only in the room about three minutes before the lady come up, and then you were sitting here the whole time, as you always do, like a cat watching a mouse."

The Inspector looked inquiringly at Célestine. "Is that true? Didn't you leave the room at all?"

"I did not actually leave her alone," admitted Célestine reluctantly, "but I went into my own room through the door here twice—once to fetch a reel of cotton, and once for my scissors. She must have done it then."

"You wasn't gone a minute," retorted the chambermaid angrily. "Just popped out and in again. I'd be glad if the police *would* search me. *I've* nothing to be afraid of."

At this moment there was a tap at the door. The Inspector went to it. His face brightened when he saw who it was.

"Ah!" he said. "That's rather fortunate. I sent for one of our female searchers, and she's just arrived. Perhaps if you wouldn't mind going into the room next door."

He looked at the chambermaid, who stepped across the threshold with a toss of her head, the searcher following her closely.

The French girl had sunk sobbing into a chair. Poirot was looking round the room.

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"Where does that door lead?" he inquired, nodding his head toward the one by the window.

"Into the next apartment, I believe," said the Inspector. "It's bolted, anyway, on the side."

Poirot walked across to it, tried it, then drew back the bolt and tried it again.

"And on the other side as well," he remarked. "Well, that seems to rule out that."

He walked over to the windows, examining each of them in turn.

"And again—nothing. Not even a balcony outside."

"Even if there were," said the Inspector impatiently, "I don't see how that would help us, if the maid never left the room."

*"Evidemment,"* said Poirot, not disconcerted. "As Mademoiselle is positive she did not leave the room—"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of the chambermaid and the police searcher.

"Nothing," said the latter laconically.

"I should hope not, indeed," said the chambermaid virtuously. "And that French hussy ought to be ashamed of herself taking away an honest girl's character!"

"There, there, my girl; that's all right," said the Inspector, opening the door. "Nobody suspects you. You go along and get on with your work."

The chambermaid went unwillingly.

"Going to search *her?"* she demanded, pointing at Célestine.

The Inspector shut the door on her and turned the key.

Célestine accompanied the searcher into the small room in her turn. A few minutes later she also returned. Nothing had been found on her.

The Inspector's face became grave.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me all the same, miss." He turned to Mrs. Opalsen. "I'm sorry, madame, but all the evidence points that way. If she's not got them on her, they're hidden somewhere in this room."

Célestine uttered another shriek, and clung to Poirot's arm. The latter bent and whispered something in the girl's ear. She looked up at him doubtfully.

*"Si, si mon enfant*—I assure you it is better not to resist." Then he turned to the Inspector. "You permit, monsieur? A little experiment—purely for my own satisfaction."

"Depends on what it is," replied the police officer.

Poirot addressed Célestine once more.

"You have told us that you went into your room to fetch a reel of cotton. Whereabouts was it?"

"On the top of the chest of drawers, monsieur."

"And the scissors?"

"They also."

"Would it be troubling you too much, mademoiselle, to ask you to

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repeat those two actions? You were sitting here with your work, you say?"

Célestine sat down, and then, at a sign from Poirot, rose, passing into the adjoining room, took up an object from the chest of drawers, and returned.

Poirot divided his attention between her movements and a large turnip of a watch which he held in the palm of his hand.

"Again, if you please, mademoiselle."

At the conclusion of the second performance he made an entry in his notebook, then returned the watch to his pocket.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. And you, monsieur,"—he bowed to the Inspector—"for your courtesy."

The Inspector seemed somewhat entertained by this excessive politeness. Célestine departed in a flood of tears, accompanied by the woman and the plain-clothes official.

Then, with a brief apology to Mrs. Opalsen, the Inspector set to work to ransack the room. He pulled out drawers, opened cupboards, completely unmade the bed, and tapped the floor and walls. Mr. Opalsen looked on skeptically.

"You really think you will find them?"

"Yes, sir. It stands to reason. She hadn't time to take them out of the room. The lady's discovering the robbery so soon upset her plans. No, they're here right enough. One of the two must have hidden them —and it's very unlikely for the chambermaid to have done so."

"More than unlikely—impossible!" said Poirot quietly.

"Eh?" The Inspector stared.

Poirot smiled modestly.

"I will demonstrate. Hastings, my good friend, take my watch in your hand—with care. It is a family heirloom! Just now I timed Mademoiselle's movements—her first absence from the room was of twelve seconds, her second of fifteen. Now observe my actions. Madame will have the kindness to give me the key of the jewel case. I thank you. My friend Hastings will have the kindness to say 'Go!' "

"Go!" I said.

With almost incredible swiftness Poirot wrenched open the drawer of the dressing-table, extracted the jewel case, fitted the key in the lock, opned the case, selected a piece of jewelry, shut and locked the case, and returned it to the drawer, which he pushed to again. His movements were like lightning.

"Well, *mon ami?*" he demanded.

"Forty-six seconds," I replied.

"You see?" He looked round. "There would not have been time for the chambermaid even to take the necklace out, far less hide it."

"Then that settles it on the maid," said the Inspector with satisfaction, and passed into the maid's bedroom next door.

Poirot was frowning thoughtfully. Suddenly he shot a question at Mr. Opalsen.

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"This necklace—it was, without doubt—insured?"

Mr. Opalsen looked a trifle surprised at the question.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly, "that is so."

"But what does that matter?" broke in Mrs. Opalsen tearfully. "It's my necklace I want. It was unique. No money could be the same."

"I comprehend, madame," said Poirot soothingly. "I comprehend perfectly. To *la femme* sentiment is everything—is it not so? But monsieur, who has not the so fine sensibility, will doubtless find some slight consolation in the fact."

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Opalsen rather uncertainly. "Still —"

He was interrupted by a shout of triumph from the Inspector. He came in dangling something from his fingers.

With a cry Mrs. Opalsen heaved herself up from her chair. She was a changed woman.

"Oh, oh, my necklace!"

She clasped it to her breast with both hands. We crowded around.

"Where was it?" demanded Opalsen.

"Maid's bed. In the mattress. She must have stolen it and hidden it there before the chambermaid arrived on the scene."

"You permit, madame?" said Poirot gently. He took the necklace from her, examined it closely, then handed it back with a bow.

"I'm afraid, madame, you'll have to hand it over to us for the time being," said the Inspector. "We shall want it for the charge. But it shall be returned to you as soon as possible."

Mr. Opalsen frowned.

"Is that necessary?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. Just a formality."

"Oh, let him take it, Ed!" cried his wife. "I'd feel safer if he did. I shouldn't sleep a wink thinking someone else might try and get hold of it. That wretched girl! And I would never have believed it of her."

"There, there, my dear, don't take on so.''

I felt a gentle pressure on my arm. It was Poirot.

"Shall we slip away, my friend? I think our services are no longer needed."

Once outside, however, he hesitated, and then, much to my surprise, he remarked, "I should rather like to see the room next door."

The door was not locked, and we entered. The room, which was a large double one, was unoccupied. Dust lay about rather noticeably, and my sensitive friend gave a characteristic grimace as he ran his finget round a rectangular mark on a table near the window.

"The *service* leaves something to be desired," he observed dryly.

He was staring thoughtfully out of the window, and seemed to have fallen into a brown study.

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"Well?" I demanded impatiently. "What did we come in here for?"

He stared.

"*Je vous demande pardon, mon ami.* I wished to see if the door was really bolted on this side also."

"Well," I said, glancing at the door which communicated with the room we had just left, "it *is* bolted."

Poirot nodded. He still seemed to be thinking.

"And, anyway," I continued, "what does it matter? The case is over. I wish you'd had more chance of distinguishing yourself. But it was the kind of case that even a stiff-backed idiot like that Inspector couldn't go wrong on."

Poirot shook his head.

"The case is not over, my friend. It will not be over until we find out who stole the pearls."

"But the maid did!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Why," I stammered, "They were found—actually in her mattress."

"Ta, ta, ta!" said Poirot impatiently. "Those were not the pearls."

"What?"

"Imitation, *mon ami*."

The statement took my breath away. Poirot was smiling placidly.

"The good Inspector obviously knows nothing of jewels. But soon there will be a fine hullabaloo!"

"Come!" I cried, dragging at his arm.

"Where?"

"We must tell the Opalsens at once."

"I think not."

"But that poor woman—"

"*Eh bien;* that poor woman, as you call her, will have a much better night believing the jewels to be safe."

"But the thief may escape with them!"

"As usual, my friend, you speak without reflection. How do you know that the pearls Mrs. Opalsen locked up so carefully tonight were not the false ones, and that the real robbery did not take place at a much earlier date?"

"Oh!" I said bewildered.

"Exactly," said Poirot, beaming. "We start again."

He led the way out of the room, paused a moment as though considering, and then walked down to the end of the corridor, stopping outside the small lounge where the chambermaids and valets of the respective floors congregated. Our particular chambermaid appeared to be holding a small court there, and to be relating her late experiences to an appreciative audience. She stopped in the middle of a sentence. Poirot bowed with his usual politeness.

"Excuse that I derange you, but I shall be obliged if you will unlock for me the door of Mr. Opalsen's room."

The woman rose willingly, and we accompanied her down the passage again. Mr. Opalsen's room was on the other side of the corridor, its door facing that of his wife's

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room. The chambermaid unlocked it with her passkey, and we entered.

As she was about to depart Poirot detained her.

"One moment. Have you ever seen among the effects of Mr. Opalsen a card like this?"

He held out a plain white card, rather highly glazed and uncommon in appearance. The maid took it and scrutinized it carefully.

"No, sir, I can't say I have. But, anyway, the valet has most to do with the gentlemen's rooms."

"I see. Thank you."

Poirot took back the card. The woman departed. Poirot appeared to reflect a little. Then he gave a short, sharp nod of the head.

"Ring the bell, Hastings. Three times, for the valet."

I obeyed, devoured with curiosity. Meanwhile Poirot had emptied the wastepaper basket on the floor, and was swiftly going through its contents.

In a few moments the valet answered the bell. To him Poirot put the same question, and handed him the card to examine. But the response was the same. The valet had never seen a card of that particular quality among Mr. Opalsen's belongings.

Poirot thanked him, and he withdrew, somewhat unwillingly, with an inquisitive glance at the overturned wastepaper basket and the litter on the floor. He could hardly have helped overhearing Poirot's thoughtful remark as he bundled the torn papers back again: "And the necklace was heavily insured . . ."

"Poirot," I cried, "I see—"

"You see nothing, my friend," he replied quickly, "as usual, nothing at all! It is incredible. Let us return to our own apartment."

We did so in silence. Once there, to my intense surprise, Poirot effected a rapid change of clothing.

"I go to London tonight," he explained. "It is imperative."

"What?"

"Absolutely. The real work, that of the brain—ah, those brave little gray cells—it is done. I go to seek the confirmation. I shall find it! Impossible to deceive Hercule Poirot!"

"You'll come a cropper one of these days," I observed, annoyed by his vanity.

"Do not be enraged, I beg of you, *mon ami*. I count on you to do me a service—of your friendship."

"Of course," I said eagerly. "What is it?"

"The sleeve of my coat that I have taken off—will you brush it? See you, a little white powder has clung to it. You without doubt observed me run my finger round the drawer of the dressing-table?"

"No, I didn't."

"You should observe my actions, my friend. Thus I obtained the powder on my finger, and being a little overexcited, I rubbed it on my sleeve; an action without method which I deplore—false to all my principles."

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"But what was the powder?" I asked, not particularly interested in Poirot's principles.

"Not the poison of the Borgias," replied Poirot, with a twinkle. "I see your imagination mounting. I should say it was French chalk."

"French chalk?"

"Yes, cabinet makers use it to make drawers run smoothly."

I laughed. "You old sinner! I thought you were working up to something exciting."

"*Au revoir*, my friend. I save myself. I fly!"

The door shut behind him. With a smile, half of derision, half of affection, I picked up the coat, and stretched out my hand for the clothes brush.

The next morning, hearing nothing from Poirot, I went out for a stroll, met some old friends, and lunched with them at their hotel. In the afternoon we went for a drive. A punctured tire delayed us, and it was past eight when I got back to the Grand Metropolitan.

The first sight that met my eyes was Poirot, looking even more diminutive than usual, sandwiched between the Opalsens, beaming in a state of placid satisfaction.

"*Mon ami* Hastings!" he cried, and sprang to meet me. "Embrace me, my friend; all has marched to a marvel!"

Luckily, the embrace was merely figurative—not a thing one is always sure of with Poirot.

"Do you mean—" I began.

"Just wonderful, I call it!" said Mrs. Opalsen, smiling all over her fat face. "Didn't I tell you, Ed, that if he couldn't get back my pearls nobody would?"

"You did, my dear, you did. And you were right."

I looked helplessly at Poirot, and he answered the glance.

"My friend Hastings is, as you say in England, all at the seaside. Seat yourself, and I will recount to you all the affair that has so happily ended."

"Ended?"

"But yes. They are arrested."

"Who are arrested?"

"The chambermaid and the valet, *parbleu!* You did not suspect? Not with my parting hint about the French chalk?"

"You said cabinet makers used it."

"Certainly they do—to make drawers slide easily. Somebody wanted that drawer to slide in and out without any noise. Who could that be? Obviously, only the chambermaid. The plan was so ingenious that it did not at once leap to the eye—not even to the eye of Hercule Poirot.

"Listen, this was how it was done. The valet was in the empty room next door, waiting. The French maid leaves the room. Quick as a flash the chambermaid whips open the drawer, takes out the jewel case, and slipping back the bolt, passes it through the door. The valet opens the jewel case at

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his leisure with the duplicate key with which he has provided himself, extracts the necklace, and waits his time. Célestine leaves the room again, and—pst!—in a flash the case is passed back again and replaced in the drawer.

"Madame arrives, the theft is discovered. The chambermaid demands to be searched, with a good deal of righteous indignation, and leaves the room without a stain on her character. The imitation necklace with which they have provided themselves has been concealed in the French girl's bed that morning by the chambermaid—a master stroke, *ça . . !*"

"But why did you go to London?"

"You remember the card?"

"Certainly. It puzzled me—and puzzles me still. I thought—"

I hesitated delicately, glancing at Mr. Opalsen.

Poirot laughed heartily.

"*Une blague!* For the benefit of the valet. The card was one with a specially prepared surface—for fingerprints. I went straight to Scotland Yard, asked for our old friend Inspector Japp, and laid the facts before him. As I had suspected, the fingerprints proved to be those of two well-known jewel thieves who have been 'wanted' for some time. Japp came down with me, the thieves were arrested, and the necklace was discovered in the valet's possession. A clever pair, but they failed in *method*. Have I not told you, Hastings, at least thirty-six times, that without method—"

"At least thirty-six thousand times!" I interrupted. "But where did their 'method' break down?"

"*Mon ami,* it is a good plan to take a place as chambermaid or valet—but you must not shirk your work. They left an empty room undusted; and therefore, when the man put down the jewel case on the little table near the communicating door, it left a rectangular mark—"

"I remember," I cried.

"Before, I was undecided. Then—I *knew!*"

There was a moment's silence.

"And I've got my pearls," said Mrs. Opalsen as a sort of Greek chorus.

"Well," I said, "I'd better have some dinner."

Poirot accompanied me.

"This ought to mean kudos for you," I observed.

"*Pas du tout,*" replied Poirot tranquilly. "Japp and the local Inspector will divide the credit between them. But"—he tapped his pocket—"I have a check here, from Mr. Opalsen, and, how say you, my friend? This week-end has not gone according to plan. Shall we return here next week-end—at my expense this time?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **D. B. BAYLOR**

TITLE: ***Mr. Bixby Buys a Picasso***

TYPE: An unusual crime

LOCALE: Chicago

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *William Stewart was a very talented art student desperately in need of money. He was also a man of action . . .*

"I'LL SEE THE STEWART BOY NOW," Mr. Bixby said. The slight tension he felt he ascribed to the long day he had put in at the Art Center and at his plant in Gary. A spare man of forty with delicate features, he'd only had time for a sandwich and a glass of milk for lunch that day, and his digestion had never been hardy.

The door opened and William Stewart came in. "Good afternoon, sir," he smiled.

"Please sit down," Mr. Bixby said.

"Thank you." Stewart took the tan leather chair in front of the desk. Mr. Bixby knew him a little better than the other students. Aside from the request he had put to Mr. Bixby personally, Stewart had attracted favorable attention since his enrollment in the Art Center three years ago. In the present matter the young man's talent was irrelevant—but it was an indisputable talent.

"I want to tell you first of all how pleased we've been with your work," Mr. Bixby said. "Mr. Furgeson is looking forward to your show in June."

"He's been very kind."

"As a matter of fact, he'd like you to be one of his gallery guides. It's quite a good gallery, you know."

"May I ask what that would pay, sir?"

"A dollar and a half an hour."

"I'm earning more than that at the Post Office, sir. We're making ends meet, but there are new expenses coming up."

"Could you work at the gallery



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in addition to the Post Office?"

"I'm putting in all the hours I can manage now, sir. I start at four in the morning and sort parcels till I come here to school. Evenings, it's three or four more hours in the despatch section, depending on how heavy the outgoing mail is. One evening last week I fell asleep at a letter case and fell off the stool." He smiled. "It was like waking up in the middle of an explosion. I'm still working there, of course, but fewer hours now."

"We discussed your request at length, Bill, but it's something of a problem for us too."

"I realize it's a great deal of money, sir, but I have every reason to believe it will hold us till spring. I'll be through with school then and in a better position to pay it back. I have it worked out in detail."

He handed Mr. Bixby a piece of paper on which were neat columns of items and figures. A month ago he had asked the Art Center for a loan of $1000. Mr. Bixby told him that he would see what he could do, but he was most reluctant to establish a precedent. Admittedly, Stewart was in a difficult position—he was supporting his wife who was about to have a baby, his grandmother, and was going to school. Admittedly, too, he had always been hard-working and his life was characterized by an admirable singleness of purpose.

But at the last meeting of the Benefactor's Board, of which Mr. Bixby was chairman, Mr. Bixby had said that however much they admired individual talent, they had to be objective. There were more than 200 students at the Center and few of whom could be called affluent. However, Mr. Bixby was not averse to helping the boy in some practical way.

Mr. Bixby loved good painting and was considered something of a connoisseur. He was a widower—his wife had first interested him in art—and their collection meant a great deal to him. His originals included a Picasso, a Van Gogh, a Modigliani trio, and a span of Rembrandt chalk drawings. He had just acquired a Rouault for $8500—a really bargain price. His apartment on Lake Shore Drive housed about thirty paintings, not counting drawings and etchings. The insurance ran over $2,000,000. It was not an extravagance—the word went against Mr. Bixby's grain; as an investment alone it was not extravagant.

He put down the paper which Stewart had given him. "What it involves, Bill, is the likelihood of other students, ones with much less talent, demanding the same consideration."

"This is only a loan, sir."

"When could you pay it back?"

"Not immediately."

"The expenses of running the Center are great, I'm afraid. The fact that we can't give you the loan—a grant, really—is not a hasty de-

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cision. What we can do is arrange for you to get supplies free of charge."

"Thank you, sir."

"It should help some."

"It'll be a big help."

"I'm glad you're taking it this way. We were afraid of disappointing you."

"No, sir. The world doesn't owe me a living. What I want to do, its merit aside, is what I want to do."

"I'm sure there's nothing else you could do as well."

"But there was nothing to prevent me from being a business major, say, in which case I'd be a far better risk for a loan."

"But your choice of career wasn't prompted by strictly material considerations," Mr. Bixby observed.

"No, sir, but that's what this interview is about. The fact is, I didn't have very high hopes about getting the loan. But in all honesty I wanted to try it first."

"You do have a certain amount of material welfare, if you want to call it that," Mr. Bixby said. "Your scholarship and your supplies."

"Yes, sir, the artist's work is subsidized—in comparison to the labor union member whose personal welfare is the real point. All of which is fine. Imagine if artists went on strikes! The country at large couldn't care less. After all, we don't keep the wheel turning. We're merely doing something that we ourselves choose to do. Maverick's, if you will. So it's up to us to get along as best we can." Stewart smiled. "But I do appreciate all you've done, sir."

"I only wish it was more," said Mr. Bixby.

"I understand you've just bought a Rouault," Stewart said.

"Yes, from a private collection. Would you like to see it?"

"Just say when, sir."

"Well, not tonight. I have to go to the opera."

"I won't keep you." Stewart got to his feet, smiled and thanked Mr. Bixby again. "You've been very kind, sir," he said.

During *Tosca* that evening, Mr. Bixby found himself looking at the necklace of the fat lady seated in front of him. Based on Stewart's figures, the necklace would have represented sustenance for Stewart's family for a decade. But very likely the necklace was worth more now than when it was first purchased. Mr. Bixby revered the financial principle involved. The tradition he had inherited—the Bixbys had been in steel for more than a century—he regarded as primarily one of responsibility. Ostentatious wealth offended him. His car, which he drove himself, was an inexpensive make several years old. His apartment, where he took Lenore Hopper after the opera to show her his new Rouault, had a well-kept but unpretentious fustiness.

"The crux of it, you understand, is that you don't dole out money

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every time somebody asks for it," he said smugly. "Shall we have brandies?"

"Perhaps there are other ways you could help him," said Lenore, a tall, oval-faced woman in her thirties. "I was thinking about your cottage at Lake Winnebago. You said his apartment isn't very nice."

"One of his teachers told me."

"You don't use the cottage much."

"It's an idea," he said. "I wouldn't have to charge him rent."

They crossed the hall to the study with their drinks. The bulk of the collection was there, for the light was good. Floor to ceiling, French doors opened to a balcony that faced the lake. The pride of the collection was a Picasso of the artist's "blue period," 40 by 40 inches, over the fireplace.

"Really, it was a steal," Mr. Bixby said.

The Rouault was on the wall between the French doors.

"I'm going to have it reframed," he said. "It needs a wider—"

His brandy bowl shattered on the parquet floor.

"Lennie! What's wrong?" Lenore grabbed Mr. Bixby's arm.

"Picasso," he said. "The Picasso."

There was a Queen Anne chair beside the door. He sat down stiffly, his head and neck rigid. It was imperative to hold his head still. He raised both hands to his brow, but the slightest movement increased the throbbing.

Things swam before him in a kind of Red Sea—red jellyfish, red eels. He had not had so bad an attack since the steel strike in '59 . . .

"I've made tea," Lenore said much later, as the sun came up.

"Have they found out anything?" Mr. Bixby's voice was weak.

"They think he came down the drainpipe from the roof."

"But the balcony doors are always locked."

"There was a scratch on one of the handles, though the lock wasn't broken."

"What about the burglar alarm system?" he asked.

"Between eight and nine last night, fuses had to be replaced in the Holgate apartment below. The short was an outside wire against a piece of copper tubing." At one time Mr. Bixby's apartment had been the top floor of a duplex. The Holgates who lived below him owned a dress shop on Michigan Boulevard and were usually home evenings. They had replaced the fuses with some difficulty in the darkness.

"The police say it was cleverly done," Lenore said.

Mr. Bixby felt strong enough to talk to his insurance man that afternoon. Mr. Bixby told him that he could not understand how a thief could expect to get rid of so famous a painting. What collector in his right mind would pay good money for it? A work of such renown

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realizes its value only in legitimate transactions. Mr. Bixby had paid $28,000 for it in 1947—of course it was worth a great deal more now.

He was able to drive to Gary two days later, and in the afternoon he caught up on his work at the Art Center. People were kind. It had been in the newspapers. Young Stewart expressed sympathy when Mr. Bixby called him into his office to tell him of his cottage at Lake Winnebago.

"That's very kind of you, sir. Is it near a railroad or bus stop?"

"Don't you have a car?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Couldn't you buy a second-hand one?"

"It would be difficult to fit it into my budget. The baby's coming soon, you know, and that's my main consideration. What I was going to say, sir, is that I have a painting in my possession now that might take the Picasso's place. I'm asking only a thousand dollars for it."

"My dear boy, how can you compare yourself to Picasso?"

"This painting is exactly the right size, sir. It would precisely fit the bare place on the wall between the two Utrillos."

"I didn't know you had ever seen my collection."

"I did once, sir. A bill of sale for one thousand dollars and a cashier's check will be fine."

"When did you see my collection?"

"I could accept the check here tomorrow and give you the painting the day after at Burnham Harbor—near the sailboat winch."

Mr. Bixby looked at him for a moment without saying anything. Then he said, "What painting is it?"

"One I have in a safe place, sir."

"What's its subject matter?"

"Very like the Picasso, sir."

"Where is it?"

"In a safe place, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Bixby, "I'm sure it's a very good painting, but the Picasso, my Picasso—It was a professional art thief, Stewart. The police know how he did it, know exactly. They're not standing still."

"I'm sure they're doing all they can, sir."

"They're doing more than that." Mr. Bixby spoke carefully. "They're figuring out who the criminal is by an analysis of the crime. I talked to them just this morning."

"Couldn't the thief have done it some other way?"

"He was lucky to be able to do it at all."

"Your apartment was once a duplex and he might have found it convenient to use the dumbwaiter from the Holgate apartment to yours. The Holgates aren't home during the day."

"He couldn't have done that," Mr. Bixby said, raising a hand to his brow.

"It wouldn't have been easy. The dumbwaiter hasn't been used in

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years. But it's operated by a chain and a little rust could be taken care of. Are you feeling all right?"

"It's the light."

"If noon is inconvenient, we could make it some other time."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Bixby raised his other hand. "I get these occasional headaches. You've been careful with it? The painting, I mean."

"It's in a safe and dry place, sir. If you'll be good enough to make out the bill of sale for a painting by William Stewart."

"William Stewart," said Mr. Bixby, squinting.

"I hope you're feeling better tomorrow, sir."

Mr. Bixby phoned Lenore at the music conservatory where she worked and picked her up there a few minutes later. They drove to her uncle's house in Highland Park. A vigorous white-haired man, Joshua Hopper was Mr. Bixby's attorney.

"The cashier's check is tricky," the lawyer said. "Why didn't he ask for a certified check?"

"But it would be pointless of him to try to spend it overnight; wouldn't it?" Mr. Bixby said.

"Will he get a jail sentence?" Lenore asked.

"We certainly can't have him get away with a thing like this," said Mr. Bixby. "No matter how much he needs money."

Hopper phoned the Park District Police.

"I won't press charges," Mr. Bixby said, "but I want to teach that boy a lesson."

The next day at the Art Center, Mr. Bixby handed Stewart a cashier's check for $1000. "Will this really solve all your problems, my boy?" he asked.

"There's no doubt about it, sir. If you'll be at the Harbor tomorrow at noon, I'll have the painting with me."

Mr. Bixby's anticipation was not unbearable. He was actually feeling better. He had no doubt, considering Stewart's knowledge, that the painting was safe. The counterespionage sort of activity he now found himself engaged in even pleased him. He decided it would be wise, in the event he was followed, to meet the men who would officially handle the matter the next day.

He chose a small bar on Irving Park Road and he kept his coat collar turned up. The two plainclothesmen were competent-looking. Mr. Bixby, now deeply in the spirit of the affair, suggested they wear something nautical. A friend of his had agreed to lend him a cruiser for the occasion. It would be docked at the pier next to the sailboat winch, and from the cruiser the two detectives could witness the transaction.

Mr. Bixby was at the harbor early. It was a fine breezy day in March. He sat on a bench facing the

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harbor, then he walked nervously up and down. He looked frequently at the Loop skyline. The two officers seemed conspicuous—they wore ordinary sailor hats above dark business suits.

The minutes passed slowly. He sat down again. One o'clock came and went and he was beginning to think that Stewart had backed out when the young man appeared with the painting wrapped in oil cloth and boxed with new pine boards. It was safe then, and Mr. Bixby almost regretted what had to be done.

"I'm sorry I'm late, sir," Stewart said. "Traffic was bad."

Mr. Bixby smiled. "Picasso on the subway."

The two policemen approached and quickly made the arrest.

"There must be some mistake, sir," Stewart said. He took out a photostat of the bill of sale.

"I'm sorry, my boy," Mr. Bixby said. "But we can't permit a thing like this to happen, you know."

Lenore and her uncle were waiting at the precinct station where the painting was unwrapped for the formal booking. Its frame was not unlike the Picasso frame and it was about the same size—but it was a painting of a young woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy.

Mr. Bixby looked at it and then at Bill Stewart as he showed the desk sergeant the bill of sale.

"I want my Picasso," Mr. Bixby said grimly.

"I think everything is in order now, sir," said Stewart.

"It's not fair," said Mr. Bixby, a wild note in his voice.

They were there for an hour. Joshua Hopper talked to the boy and to the police. When he joined Lenore and Mr. Bixby in one of the offices, he said, "You bought a painting by William Stewart for one thousand dollars."

"It's not right," said Mr. Bixby, his voice wilder.

"Do you have your pills with you?" Lenore asked.

"It's not fair," Mr. Bixby moaned. "I wasn't going to press charges."

He could not drive his own car. Hopper said, "It's been a long time since I've shifted gears." At Mr. Bixby's apartment Lenore brought him a pill and a glass of water for the pain in his neck, head, and eyes. Hopper had set the Stewart painting on a chair.

"He does have talent, doesn't he?" he said.

"I haven't seen anything like it since Dillinger," said Mr. Bixby.

"But it is good, isn't it, Lennie?" Lenore asked.

"Damn him," Mr. Bixby said, for in spite of what had occurred he liked the painting. The model must have been Mrs. Stewart, a handsome girl with brown hair and deep eyes. She wore only a slip, a cheap wrinkled pink slip—yes, the boy's craftsmanship was superb. She was sitting on a wooden chair

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against a background of infinite blue, and all the details of their lives were there—the not enough, the doing without, all there in miraculous suggestion and vivid reality. Her breasts were full and well shaped and her hands, resting on her lap palms upward, implied an attitude of supplication. She seemed to be staring beyond the viewer's shoulder, and there was something, a spirit, a mood—the something Mr. Bixby had noticed in Stewart's work before. Honesty, he thought. A final honesty—paradoxically, that was it. An honesty that was almost—

Lenore and her uncle looked at him as he got to his feet. He set his glass down on an end table—on the very edge so that it fell to the worn Aubusson.

"What is it?" Hopper said.

Mr. Bixby turned to the door.

"Lennie," Lenore said, getting up.

Mr. Bixby crossed the hall, opened the study door, and even switched on the lights which was unnecessary. It was a bright afternoon. He stared at the Picasso, blue and unharmed and perfectly in place. Behind him Lenore gave a gasp of surprise.

Mr. Bixby turned and walked past her and past Hopper in the hallway, back to the living room. He stared at Stewart's painting. He raised a hand to his brow.

"Lennie, what is it?" Lenore asked.

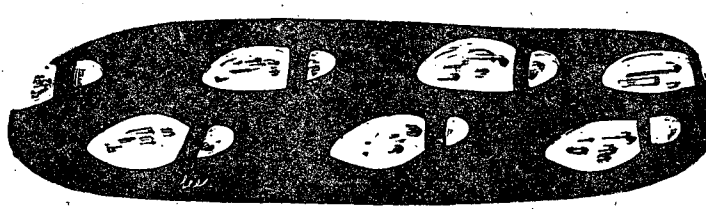
"I don't know." His voice was high.

"You want to sit down?" she asked anxiously.

Mr. Bixby raised his other hand and then, oddly, gave a high little laugh. "I like it better than the Picasso," he said.

"Well, there's nothing wrong then," Hopper smiled.

"Nothing wrong?" Mr. Bixby squinted. "Do you know what I *paid* for that Picasso?"



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*A devastating—and frightening—story in which, to quote from Damon Knight's s.f. introduction, "TV may become preferable to, and indistinguishable from, 'real life.'"*

*Audience participation in future TV?—"for the first time a member of the viewing audience will actually be able to take part in the violence and terror that have brought happiness to so many" . . .*

*As we said, a devastating and frightening story about a new American way of life . . .*

# YOU ARE WITH IT!

*WILL STANTON*

"THE DEEP FREEZE HAS BEEN acting up again." Kay Dobbs slid into the breakfast nook across from her husband. "I wish you'd call the man as soon as you get to the office."

Stanley Dobbs folded his paper to the editorial page. "All right."

"Tell him it hasn't worked right since the last time he was here." She reached across and folded back a corner of the paper to examine an advertisement for handbags. "Did you remember to call your friend about the speaker for the P.T.A.?"

"I'll do it first thing."

"Better phone the phone company too. Find out about that long-distance call they charged us for."

"Yes, I'd better do that."

"I think it makes more of an impression coming from a man," Kay said.

Stanley backed his car out to the street. Kay waved goodbye from the picture window. It was the custom in Belle Acres for wives to wave goodbye from their picture windows.

At the end of the block Stanley joined a small stream of commuters winding their way down to the station. Here, along with the members of other tributaries, they were picked up by the train, much like a river picking up silt to be deposited at the end of its run.

Stanley was reviewing his schedule for the day as he stepped into his office and closed the door. Immediately he was aware of certain changes. In fact, the office bore slight resemblance to the room he had left the night before. It was more like a half-lighted stage with billows of mist rising from various points on the floor. In the center, seated at a small round table, was a solitary figure in evening clothes. When he spoke his voice had a hollow, artificial quality, rather like an

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actor rehearsing in the bottom of a well.

"How do you do?" he remarked in a faintly bogus British accent. "Won't you join me? For the next ninety minutes I am to be your host."

"How do you do?" said Stanley. He hesitated and then walked over, placed his hat and brief case on the table and sat down.

"You are now where no mortal has ever been." The host was projecting his voice as if addressing a vast audience. "You are just over the horizon. The exact spot? Well, you won't find it on any map, nor the date on any calendar."

"It's the seventeenth," said Stanley. "Tuesday."

"It is twenty-five hours past midnight on the thirty-first of November," said the host. "You are about to start your perilous journey into the unknown."

Stanley looked at his watch. "I did have a couple of phone calls to make—"

The host smiled. "Perhaps I have been needlessly mystifying you," he remarked in a more conversational tone. "This, as you may have guessed, is a new sort of television program. It is a combination of adventure, supernatural, and audience participation. A chap from Duke University suggested it."

Stanley nodded politely. "It sounds very interesting."

"It is more than interesting," said the host. "It is voodoo, black magic, and witchcraft brought into every home through the marvels of modern communication. For the first time a member of the viewing audience will actually be able to take part in the violence and terror that have brought happiness to so many."

"I'm afraid I haven't been keeping up with TV lately," Stanley admitted. "Since we put in the new patio we've been sitting out there a great deal."

"When the time comes you will know what to do," the host assured him. "You are not being asked to play a part—you are going to *live the part*. Mr. Stanley Dobbs—You Are With It!"

The last words were picked up by echoing voices and repeated in tones that faded with the light until Stanley found himself alone in the dark and the silence.

As the lights came on again Stanley discovered that he was standing beneath the marquee of a night club. The doorman bowed. "The Commissioner was here looking for you," he said.

Nodding absently, Stanley went inside and sat down at a quiet table in the corner. There was a good crowd present, eating, drinking, and listening to the music of Arabella and her All-Girl Orchestra.

After a moment he was joined by the proprietress—Big Yvette. "We haven't seen you for quite a while."

He shrugged. "You know how it is."

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"Yes, I know." Big Yvette placed her hand on his. "I worry about you."

"I have a job to do," Stanley said.

"I suppose we shouldn't complain about that," she said, "with so much unemployment and all."

A waiter approached the table. He was carrying a bottle of Napoleon brandy. "Compliments of Arabella and her All-Girl Orchestra," he explained.

"Oh." Abruptly he realized that the music had stopped.

"They're backstage," the waiter told him.

"I'd like to thank them," Stanley said. He went back and entered the dressing room.

The orchestra leader looked up with a cry of delight. "Darling, we've missed you." She put her arms around his neck.

"I just wanted to thank you," he said, "before I left."

"Before you left?"

He nodded. "I have a job to do."

"Oh." There was disappointment in her voice. "We were hoping you could come up to our place after the show."

"Our place?" he repeated.

"We share an apartment." She indicated the other members of the band. "We've taken the top floor of the U.N. Hilton."

"Let's just say I'll make it if I can," he said. "You know I'd like to."

Her arms tightened around his neck. "You really mean it?"

He looked down into her eyes. Turning his head, he looked into the eyes of Francine and Iris and Millie-Jo and Ursula and Gretchen and Dee and Carlotta and the rest. "I mean it," he said.

Outside the club he caught a taxi. "I got a message for you," the driver told him, "from the Big Boy himself. He said to lay off."

"He did?" said Stanley, coolly lighting a cigarette. "I heard the Big Boy was knocked off last week."

"He was," the driver said. "But I been in bed with a cold. This is the first chance I had to deliver the message."

"Let me out at the next corner," Stanley said. He paid the driver. "Better take care of that cold," he said.

"They say summer colds are the worst kind," the driver said.

Stanley went into a vacant garage and down three flights of stairs and rapped on the door. It was opened by a man whose face was known to no more than three or four persons in the entire country.

"Good evening, Chief," Stanley said, following him into the luxuriously appointed office.

"I don't believe you have met the Contessa." The Chief gestured toward a beautiful young woman sitting at one side of the room in an ermine wrap. "She will accompany you as far as Budapest. After that you will be on your own."

Stanley bowed. The Chief un-

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rolled a map. "We have learned that the secret police are holding the Professor in a fortress at this spot. It will be your job to get him out of the country unharmed. You will follow our standard procedure in dealing with the guards. As for the electric fence, the dogs, and the mine fields, you will no doubt wish to use your own methods."

"It seems pretty much routine," Stanley said. "I should think one of your regular operatives could handle the job."

"The Professor himself presents no particular problem," the Chief conceded. "However, smuggling his cyclotron out of the country may prove more difficult. I think it only fair to warn you that it may involve considerable risk."

Stanley shrugged. "That's what I get paid for."

"So you do." The Chief put down the map and picked up his pipe. "Is that the real reason you do it?" he inquired. "For the money?"

Stanley smiled a tight, cryptic little smile. "There are certain persons who criticize what we call the American way of life. I don't happen to be among them. And when something threatens that way of life —" he paused to smile again—"I do what has to be done."

The Chief nodded. "How soon can you leave?" he asked . . .

The next morning Stanley was late coming down to breakfast. "You'll have to hurry or you'll miss your train," his wife said.

Stanley swallowed his juice. "If I have to hurry I'll hurry," he said, "I've done it before."

"I wish you didn't have to work late so often," Kay said, "I didn't even hear you come in."

"I didn't notice the time."

"I don't suppose you remembered to call the deep-freeze man? Well, we're going to have to do something about the water softener too."

"All right."

"I've made out a list," she said. "I've put it in your breast pocket. For one thing, I think you ought to call several boarding kennels. You know how busy they're going to be at vacation time, and last year I'm sure they didn't remember to give Mr. Toidy his grated carrots."

"I'll make a point of that," he said.

"I simply can't stand it when an animal doesn't receive proper care," she said. "It does something to me."

Stanley was a little late getting to the office . . . but the truck was waiting. He climbed up in the cab beside the driver. "Do you know that old warehouse down on Sixth?" he asked.

The driver nodded. "Sure, but it won't be open this time of night."

"I've got a tip that they're running a brewery there," Stanley said. "How much speed can you get out of this truck?"

"Fifty—maybe fifty-five," the driver said. He revved up the engine. "It ought to be enough to break through the doors."

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"It's worth a try," Stanley said.

They rammed the doors and came to a halt in the middle of the warehouse. On both sides of them were rows of barrels. There was no one in sight.

Stanley seized an ax and handed one to the driver. "I'll take this side and you take that one," he said. Raising the ax, he drove it into the top of the first barrel. Then he went on to the next. He and the driver reached the end of their rows at the same time. He leaned his ax against the wall. "How's it going?" he asked.

The driver wiped his forehead. "All the barrels on this side got dishes in them," he said.

"Same here," Stanley said. "It looks like somebody gave me a wrong steer."

"Well," said the driver, "you can't win them all."

Stanley rolled down his sleeves. "There's just one other possibility."

In the gambling room Stanley moved from table to table, killing time. One of the dealers beckoned. "The Boss wants to see you," he said. "Upstairs."

Stanley nodded. Upstairs the door was opened by a hard-faced man, who motioned him inside. The Boss was seated at the head of a long table. On either side were assembled all the notorious names of the underworld.

"We've been expecting you," the Boss remarked in a silky tone. He moved his hand to indicate the others. "I believe you may know some of these gentlemen."

"I believe so." Stanley nodded. "Abdul . . . Agasis . . . Albrecht . . . Alvarado . . . Andradi . . . Antorski . . . Aristides . . . Aspasian . . ."

"Yes," said the Boss, "now, then—"

"Bakunin . . . Baldini . . . Bauman . . ." Stanley continued strolling beside the table. "Beckhold . . . Bernardo . . . Bjornstrom . . . Black Eagle . . ."

"Let's get down to business," the Boss said. "You'll find a package at the end of the table."

Stanley gave it a casual glance. "What's in it?"

"What does it look like?"

Stanley opened the package. "It looks like two and a half million dollars," he said, "in small bills." He tossed it back on the table.

"It's yours," the Boss said. "Take it. Go on a vacation somewhere."

"Perhaps I forgot to tell you," Stanley said. "I have a job to do."

The Boss studied him, his eyes narrowed. "We'll double it."

Stanley returned the stare. "There is such a thing as the American Dream," he remarked softly, "and when any group or organization threatens to destroy it, well—" he smiled briefly—"there are a few of us who do what we can."

"So?" The Boss's voice was dangerously low. "You would really like to believe we would all allow you to leave here alive?"

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"Say that again." Stanley was playing for time. He shot a lightning glance around the room, calculating the odds. He had got out of tighter corners, and the element of surprise was on his side. He closed his eyes for a moment, his mind rapidly formulating a plan . . .

When he woke up, Kay was in the kitchen. He could smell the coffee. "Did you remember to check with the man about the garage door?" she asked when he was at the table.

"He wasn't in."

"I wish you didn't have to spend so much time at the office," Kay said.

He reached for the marmalade. "I have a job to do."

"I know, but you don't have to kill yourself."

He put marmalade on a piece of toast. "That's true."

"The insurance is due today," she said . . .

At the door of his office he paused for a moment and then went in. The Lieutenant looked up from his desk. "Sorry to bother you," he said, "but this one really has us stopped."

"Is that so?" Stanley sat on the corner of the desk. "Fill me in."

The Lieutenant lifted his hand helplessly. "What is there to tell? The man was found on the steps of Grant's Tomb. Young, well dressed, no signs of violence, no identification, no witnesses. The autopsy showed him to be in perfect health —if he'd been alive, that is."

"I see. Then you don't have any idea what killed him?"

The Lieutenant got to his feet, pacing across the room. "I've stopped having ideas," he said. "Maybe we killed him. Society—maybe that did it. There seems to be a new sickness now—no goals, no ideals, nothing to live for. Maybe some day we'll all just stop living."

"Well, Lieutenant," Stanley remarked, "I don't see why you don't just throw in the sponge. Enjoy yourself while you can."

The Lieutenant gave him an irritated glance. "Don't talk crazy. I'm getting paid to do a job."

"You say there was no identification on the body?"

The Lieutenant shook his head wearily. "No wallet, no keys, no letters—nothing but this." He picked up a slip of paper from the desk. "This was in his breast pocket. It appears to be some kind of code, but the boys in the cipher room haven't been able to break it yet." He tossed it across the desk.

Stanley picked it up and started to read. "'Deep fr.—board ken.—P.T.A.—phone phone co.—gar. Dr. —pay ins—'" His eyes traveled to the bottom of the paper; there seemed to be about forty entries. Somewhere in the back of his mind was an elusive wisp of meaning.

"Does it mean anything?" the Lieutenant asked quickly.

"The pieces are all here," he said slowly, "or most of the pieces. If I can put them together—"

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"Sorry, gentlemen, I'm afraid it's all over."

The two men looked up, startled, to see a shadowy figure in the doorway. It was the host.

"All over?" The Lieutenant stared. "What do you mean?"

"The show," replied the host. "At the last minute the sponsor changed his mind."

"The sponsor?" Stanley said.

"Actually the sponsor's wife, I believe, but that is neither here nor there. At any rate, you are now free to return to your normal everyday lives."

Stanley turned slowly toward the Lieutenant. "Our normal everyday lives."

"Quite right," said the host briskly. "And now if you will turn in any props you may have—"

Stanley reached in his pocket and drew out the pistol.

"Is it loaded?" the host inquired. "You'd better empty it."

"Yes," Stanley said, "perhaps that would be best." When the gun was empty he dropped it on the desk.

The Lieutenant looked thoughtfully at the figure on the floor. "Sometimes we have to do things we don't like," he observed. "It's all part of the job."

"I know." Stanley picked up the slip of paper from the desk. He folded it carefully, then leaned over the body and tucked the paper in the breast pocket.

"There *is* such a thing as the American Dream," the Lieutenant continued softly, "and when someone threatens to destroy it—"

"We do what has to be done," Stanley said. He put the gun in his pocket. "I guess that wraps it up."

The Lieutenant frowned. "There's still one detail. I hate to ask you, but we have to get telephotos of a certain office. The only place they can be taken from is the top floor of the U.N. Hilton. It will mean being confined there for a week or more—"

Stanley shrugged. "As you said, Lieutenant, it's all part of the job." He turned then, and walked slowly into the night.

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*Our favorite fictional partners-in-criminology—Martin Leroy (?Manfred Lee) (?Manfred Ellery) and King Danforth (?Queen Dannay)—in a case which, much to their delight (and to yours, we hope), permitted the great "Leroy King" to test his (their) deductive wings against the "bracing air of reality" . . .*

# THE HONG KONG JEWEL MYSTERY

*by JAMES HOLDING*

ALTHOUGH THEY HAD COLLABORATED in the writing of scores of best-selling detective novels, only once in their career did King Danforth and Martin Leroy themselves become the victims of an actual crime. This was in Hong Kong, during an around-the-world vacation trip with their wives aboard the cruise ship *Valhalla*. And the incident permitted them, much to their delight, to try for the first time their deductive wings, hitherto tested only in theoretical flight, against the bracing air of reality.

The *Valhalla* arrived in Hong Kong Harbor in the early morning. As soon as she docked at Kowloon, and the gangplank was run up to B Deck, Leroy and Danforth, with their wives, immediately went ashore. They spent a pleasant morning sightseeing on the mainland. They ate a superb luncheon of butterfly shrimp and fried rice at the Dragon Inn on the way back from their glimpse of Red China in the New Territories. And they made an extended visit to the establishment of Mr. Gene Pao (pronounced Bow), an excellent Chinese tailor, replenishing their wardrobes at fabulously low prices.

Then, at four o'clock, exhausted by this frenzy of tourist activity, they gratefully returned to the *Valhalla* for a short siesta before dinner. As they walked through the tall iron gate at the end of the pier beside which the ship lay, Leroy said, "Look at that. They're painting the old girl."

Festooned about the ship's vast hull, hanging by ropes and slings everywhere they looked, were chattering Chinese coolies, rapidly applying a coat of fresh white paint to the *Valhalla*.

"There must be at least fifty of them," said Helen Leroy, impressed.

"They're cute," Carol Danforth decided. "They look like little boys at an amusement park."

In their cabin on A Deck, Helen tossed her hat on the bed. Then she pulled off the snap-on earrings she was wearing and opened the top



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drawer of her dressing table to put them away. In a shocked, incredulous voice she exclaimed, "Oh, no!"

"What's the matter?" Leroy said.

"My jewelry! It's been stolen! Except for what I had on." She gulped. "Look!"

Leroy went over and looked into the drawer. It had been hurriedly ransacked. Helen's small leather jewel case was lying there with its lid open, empty.

Leroy asked, "Everything?"

"Yes. My diamond circle pin. Mother's engagement ring. My sapphire and diamond bracelet. My good earrings." Her voice rose to a wail as she sagged forlornly on the edge of her bed. "Even my gold pin and charm bracelet! What'll we do?"

"Report it. Right away. That's standard procedure." Leroy sprang to the door, snatched it open, and dashed into the corridor. He almost collided with King Danforth who was coming out of his cabin next door.

"Mart!" Danforth cried. "What do you know? Our stateroom's been burgled! Carol's jewelry is gone!"

Leroy slid to a stop. "What? You, too?"

The literary team of "Leroy King" gazed at each other like two auditors who have simultaneously run across evidence of embezzlement in the records of an otherwise blameless charitable institution. Then they grinned at each other. Danforth said, "We're supposed to know how to act in circumstances like these. Come on over and let's kick it around a little, eh?"

"Okay."

Leroy re-entered his room. Helen, who had overheard, was already more cheerful in the knowledge that her misery had congenial company.

Leroy said, "Your good stuff's insured, hon."

"I know. But I can't replace my mother's heirloom ring. Or the bracelet you gave me on our tenth anniversary. They have sentimental value, damn it!" Helen rarely swore. She lifted a hand and brushed back a strand of her honey-colored hair. "Oh, well."

Leroy examined the stateroom. He saw nothing remotely suggesting a clue—except, perhaps, the small indentation in the center of his bed, directly below the open porthole.

Helen said, "If you've solved the mystery, let's go tell Carol and King how it happened." She stood up with a watery smile. "Poor Carol. If they've taken her diamond wrist watch . . ."

They had. Along with the rest of her jewelry. "Why don't you two experts call the police?" Carol asked.

"Call Charlie Chan," Helen suggested. "Or Mr. Moto. They're the boys for Oriental crime, I believe."

"Wait," said Danforth. "Give Leroy King a chance. We want to do this stylishly. Our reputation may well be at stake. Leave us not be hasty."

Helen sat down on Carol's dressing-table stool. "Well, do it stylish-

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ly, boys, by all means. But do *something*."

"First," said Leroy, lighting a cigarette and looking at his partner, "as long as we're both insured, we can afford to be cool and objective. So let's think of something intelligent."

Carol sighed. "Intelligence! At a time like this!" She collapsed on her bunk.

Leroy was looking at Danforth's bed and the porthole above it. "You've got a footprint, too," he said to King, "on the bed under your open porthole. That's how the thief got in, quite obviously. Slid through the porthole, slipped down on the bed, cleaned out the drawers of the dressing table, then stepped up on the bed, and went out the same way."

"Through an opening less than sixteen inches wide?" King questioned.

"Sure. How else? Our doors were locked." Leroy's tone was confident.

"The painters," King murmured tentatively.

"Some of them are certainly small enough to squirm through our portholes," Carol said. "I said they looked like little boys, didn't I?"

King continued: "It seems the simplest and most logical solution, all right. So let's say it was a painter. A Chinese coolie. That reduces our suspects to a mere fifty or so."

"Fewer than that, King. Only the ones painting in the vicinity of these cabins would have noticed our open portholes and had the chance to duck in and out in a hurry—without being seen by a lot of other coolies."

"Maybe they don't care who sees them," Carol suggested. "Maybe they all compete in a spirit of good clean fun to rob American tourists."

"Don't be bitter," said Danforth. "You are distracting two fine minds from keen assessment of this interesting problem. He rubbed a hand slowly over his hair and began to enjoy himself.

Leroy caught the gleam in his eye and smiled at him. This was a game they had played a thousand times in plotting their books. "What we've got to do," Leroy said, "is discover which painters were nearest our portholes."

"That ought to be easy," Helen offered sweetly. "I'm sure they all speak English."

Carol said, "Call the cops, men. Please. I want my jewelry back. Not just an impersonal insurance check!"

Leroy said, "I wonder what their rules are, over here, regarding bodily search?"

"Search whom?" Carol asked.

"The painters," said Leroy. "There's a big iron gate at the foot of this pier. And it was patrolled by British bobbies when we came through it just now. If they would be willing to search the painters as they go out. . . ."

Danforth glanced at his watch. "Still time if the painters knock off at five o'clock," he said. "Let's go."

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Twenty minutes later the purser of the *Valhalla* had reported the theft to the Hong Kong police; the guards at the gate had been alerted and had promised to search every painter as he left the dock; and a Police Department jeep had arrived bearing Detective-Inspector Lo, assigned to their case from the CID office of Tsien Sha Tsin Police Station.

Inspector Lo proved to be a polite, quiet-spoken Chinese in western clothes, with a high, intelligent forehead, a pink scalp that shone through his sparse, combed-back hair, and liquid dark eyes of almost feminine beauty.

"He's darling!" Helen whispered to Carol. "You can have Charlie Chan. I'll take Inspector Lo."

Danforth briefed him skillfully on the robbery. "We took the liberty of asking the dock police to search the painting gang as they leave the ship, Inspector," he finished.

Inspector Lo nodded. "I checked with the dock police when I came onto the pier," he said in excellent English. "All members of the painting gang have now been searched. No jewelry was found, I am sorry to say."

Leroy looked at Danforth, and both shrugged.

Inspector Lo mounted with them to A Deck and carefully examined their staterooms, their portholes, and the deck outside. He held an earnest colloquy in Cantonese with a tan-clad policeman at the end of their corridor. Then he directed a cheerful smile at the dejected faces of Carol and Helen, and said gently, "One of the painting gang. No question about it, ladies. Please leave everything to me."

Dispiritedly, Leroy said, "We were going to Aberdeen for dinner. Any reason why we shouldn't?"

"Go, please, and enjoy yourselves." Inspector Lo paused, then added shyly, "Once the bread is in the oven, it does not need the baker."

"Isn't he a living doll?" Helen breathed.

Inspector Lo departed for the purser's office. Leroy King and his two wives prepared for dinner. The wives, regrettably, did not have their best jewelry to wear with their best dresses.

They returned to the ship several hours later, soothed by an impeccably served dinner at the Sea Palace and thrilled by a view of the magic harbor at night—from the observation point high on the peak of Hong Kong island above the clustered lights of Victoria. There was a message in the Leroys' room to call at the purser's office. All four of them hurried down together.

Hansen, the tall Norwegian purser, held out his cupped palm to Helen. "Is this your ring?" he asked.

Her eyes lighted up. "Yes!" she cried. "The tourmaline you bought

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for me in Rio, Mart! It was one of the things stolen today."

"Where did you find it, Mr. Hansen?" Danforth asked practically.

The purser raised his hands in admiration. "Inspector Lo brought thirty men on board, and they went over every inch of the ship, and then the dock, like mice looking for grains of wheat. This is the only thing they found. It was lying on the dock, Mr. Danforth. About three feet from the edge against which the ship lies, and down toward the gate."

"Let's go and see the place," Helen suggested.

"There's a small circle of white paint at the spot, Mrs. Leroy," said the purser.

They descended the gangplank to the dock and walked along it to where the pier lights revealed a small circle of white paint on the wooden planking. They stood around this visible mark of Inspector Lo's industry and regarded it in silence.

Then King said, "One ring only. On the dock. Nothing on the ship."

Leroy nodded slowly. "And look." He pointed. "You can see the pier gate from here. From this spot the thief could have seen the search of his buddies at the gate."

"And he therefore made a quick decision," Danforth said. "He realized he would be caught red-handed, with the jewelry on him. So what does he do?"

Carol groaned aloud. "Don't tell me," she pleaded.

Danforth said, "He gives up any idea of profiting from his robbery the minute he sees the painters are being searched. He gets rid of the jewelry."

"You mean," Helen said in a pained voice, "that he throws all our beautiful watches and rings and bracelets into Hong Kong Harbor?"

"Head of the class, darling," said Leroy. "Probably at this very spot. He just quietly drops the stuff into the water between the ship's side and the edge of the dock."

"What about the tourmaline ring?" Helen asked.

"A near-miss," said Danforth. "When he tossed the stuff into the water, that ring didn't quite make it to the edge of the dock. It hit the pier and stayed on it."

"The beast!" wailed Carol. "Oh, the heartless, dishonest little beast!"

An hour later Inspector Lo found them in the Horseshoe Bar of the *Valhalla*, drinking a farewell toast, in stingers-on-the-rocks, to their lost property. The Inspector bustled in, looking not at all dashed. Quite the contrary. At their invitation he sat down with them.

"The investigation progresses," he announced cheerfully. "No, no drink, thank you. I am too busy. The purser showed you the tourmaline ring?"

They nodded.

Inspector Lo smiled. "It is a clue," he said proudly.

"Some clue," Carol murmured.

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"Just an arrow pointing to a watery grave. Isn't that right, Inspector? Didn't the thief throw our jewelry into the harbor?"

"I fear so. But that is no reason to despair."

"What do you mean? Show me a better reason."

"I have already arranged for a deep-sea diving rig and an expert diver. Tomorrow we shall search the bottom of the sea for your jewelry, ladies. The Hong Kong police do not give up easily, you see."

"I'll say you don't," admitted Danforth admiringly. "Any clues as to the guilty painter yet?"

"Not yet. This takes a little time, you understand—even to get a complete list of the painters' names and to look up their records, if any. Then to interrogate fifty of them, to break down the fiber of their group loyalty and personal friendships to the point where they will talk freely of what they have seen or done—" He shrugged. "I have at least done some screening. There are sixteen painters, according to their foreman, who could have robbed you—that is, who had the physical opportunity."

"Sixteen," said Leroy, "is still a lot of suspects."

Next morning, when they left the ship to get a fitting of the new clothes they had ordered from the tailor, Mr. Pao, they saw Inspector Lo waving to them from the deck of a small diving barge anchored across the dock from the *Valhalla*. They waved back. When they returned to the ship after luncheon, he intercepted them at the foot of the passenger gangplank. He wore a broad smile on his face and carried a large manila envelope in his hand.

"This is what we have found so far," he said quietly, dumping the envelope's contents into his other hand. He was obviously pleased with himself. "Forty feet down. In two inches of muck."

Incredulously they stared at the collection of jewelry in his hand—until, in honest amazement, Leroy said, "Inspector, you're a genius!"

"No," Lo disclaimed politely, while his eyes glinted with pleasure. "I have a very good diver."

Helen and Carol rapidly catalogued the recovered items.

"And," the Inspector promised gallantly, "we will find more! Trust the Hong Kong Police Department, please."

He was as good as his word. By five o'clock his manila envelope contained seventeen of the twenty-five articles that had been stolen from their staterooms. He showed them to the Danforths and Leroys in the latter's cabin. "Tomorrow," he predicted, "we recover the rest."

After he left them, Leroy tapped his fingers against his shadowed jaw, now in need of its second shave of the day. He seemed preoccupied.

"What's bothering you?" Carol asked laughing. "Are you jealous of Inspector Lo?"

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Leroy's frown indicated deep thought. "I hate to throw cold water," he said finally, "but one fact leaps to the eye."

"What?"

"Didn't you notice," said Leroy, "that although seventeen of your stolen things have been found, not a single one of the really *valuable* pieces you lost is among them?"

"All that stuff he just showed us," Danforth supplemented, "was costume jewelry. The inexpensive items."

"Check your lists, girls," Leroy said. "Isn't every one of the still-missing pieces an expensive one? Set with diamonds or sapphires or something obviously quite valuable?"

"Y-e-s," Helen said reluctantly.

"So something is sour," Danforth said, "on the law of averages alone. But what?"

"Not Inspector Lo," Helen said stoutly. "He's a dear, honest detective and I'll stake my life on it. He'll find the rest of our things tomorrow. You'll see."

Leroy rasped his stubble impatiently. "The tourmaline ring, King. It's not very valuable actually, but more so than any of the other items Lo has recovered. Yet they found it on the dock. How come?"

"To make us think just what we did think—and what Inspector Lo still thinks. That *all* the stuff was thrown into the water, because one of the more valuable pieces was found marking the spot."

"In which case the inevitable conclusion is that the thief threw everything in that wasn't worth much, and kept everything out that he thought really valuable."

"Kept it out? But where?" Helen asked.

"There you have me," Leroy shrugged. "But our clever little coolie probably worked something out."

Danforth said, "Anything a clever coolie can work out, we ought to be able to work out, too. So start thinking, Mart."

"I have," Leroy grinned. "Let's see. The ship has been fine-tooth-combed by Lo and his thirty cops. Right? Ditto the dock. And the painters have all, individually, been carefully searched each time they've left the dock since the robbery. So the thief hasn't carried away the loot; and he hasn't left it hidden on the ship itself or on the dock."

"Brilliant," said Carol. "You're right back where you started. The stuff's in the harbor, that's where."

"No," Leroy said stubbornly.

Danforth said, "If he saw his buddies being searched, he'd not only have to think fast, he'd have to act fast, too, wouldn't he?"

"That figures," Leroy said. "He couldn't waste any time looking for a hiding place. It had to be handy, right near where he discovered that the painters were being searched."

Suddenly Danforth slapped his thigh with a report like a pistol shot. Helen and Carol jumped. "Hey,"

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said Danforth exuberantly, "what about the most obvious hiding place of all for a painter? In his can of paint?"

"Bingo!" Leroy exclaimed. "I think you've hit it, King. His paint can would be handy, quick, and practical. And probably be taken off the ship when the painting is finished without the police giving it a second thought."

Danforth reached for the telephone. "Where do you think the painters leave their equipment overnight?" he said. "Up in the forepeak? Let's ask the purser to have somebody search those paint cans right now."

But after a few eager words with the purser on the telephone, King turned back to them, crestfallen, and slowly replaced the receiver. "Nuts," he said. "The purser says that Inspector Lo had all the paint cans searched yesterday. First thing he did after we left him to go to dinner."

"You're only twenty-four hours behind my favorite detective with *that* idea," Helen needled them. "Come on, men, you'll have to start thinking again."

Danforth said, "If we're right about his hiding the good pieces of jewelry, he had to hide them before he reached the spot on the dock where the tourmaline ring was found. Right?"

"Right," Leroy agreed. "And that localizes it pretty well. Since the stuff's not on the ship, it's somewhere between our staterooms here and the place where the tourmaline ring was found."

"And the moment he saw the painters being searched at the dock gate," Danforth said, "he knew that his biggest problem was to get his loot ashore without being caught. Obviously, it was going to be impossible before our ship sailed." Danforth rubbed a hand over his head. "So what's the next logical move for him?"

Promptly Leroy replied, "To hide the valuable pieces in some way that would permit him to recover them *after* the ship has sailed."

"Exactly. So we're looking for a hiding place that's quickly accessible to a departing painter, and guaranteed to be *still* here after the ship has sailed tomorrow."

"Not *on* the ship," Leroy mused. "Not *on* his person. Not *on* the dock. But how about *beside* the dock?"

"That's the same old thing," Carol said. "In the water."

"Do you mean . . . ?" Danforth began, but Leroy interrupted him.

"Why not in one of the bumpers?"

"Bumpers?" Helen asked, puzzled.

"Sure. You know—those old automobile tires they hang down the side of the dock to act as fenders when a ship comes alongside?"

"That," said Danforth, jumping to his feet, "is a very interesting possibility. Lo's men could have overlooked them, with the ship's side actually resting against some of

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them. Let's go and look for ourselves. Bring a flashlight, Carol, will you?"

They trooped out of the ship onto the dock. It was a balmy evening. The velvety darkness of the harbor was laced with the moving lights of the Kowloon-Victoria ferries. The oily harbor water glinted and winked between garish banks of neon advertising signs. Hong Kong's sharp, acid, not unpleasant smell filled the night air.

With the aid of Carol's flashlight they carefully examined all the tire-fenders hanging on both sides of the dock and far forward as the spot where the tourmaline ring had been found. They found nothing.

Leroy shook his head sadly. "We're getting old, pal," he said to Danforth. "Maybe Leroy King should retire and live on his royalties."

"Good idea," Carol said jauntily. "And to begin with, who's for a martini?" She and Carol turned back.

In the *Valhalla's* Horseshoe Bar, Danforth said in an insistent though disgruntled voice, "That jewelry's out there some place! I know it. Hidden in something that will still be here after the ship sails tomorrow."

"In the water," Carol murmured. "Just as Inspector Lo believes."

Danforth muttered to himself and started to take a sip of his cocktail. Suddenly, in mid-swallow, he choked. He put his drink down on the bar so abruptly that it spilled. "Mart!" he said. "How do the painters leave the ship when they knock off work at night?"

For a moment Leroy stared. "By Jove!" he said, then, his eyes widening. "The very place!"

Danforth coughed and rushed on, "The ship normally uses its own, but here it must be part of the port facilities."

"And therefore it *stays* here when the ship has sailed," Leroy finished.

"And from there the thief could have seen his buddies being searched at the dock gate."

"What are you two talking about?" asked Carol plaintively.

She received no answer. For the other cruise passengers in the ship's bar were at that moment treated to the sight of Leroy and Danforth abandoning their drinks and running from the room, followed more sedately by their puzzled wives.

Helen and Carol found their husbands standing on B Deck at the top of the gangplank. This cleated wooden walkway, that led from B Deck down to the dock, was bordered on either side by waist-high handrails made of three-inch aluminum pipe. The upper ends of these pipes were stopped with polished teakwood plugs—like finials at the top of two horizontal flagpoles.

Without a word Danforth laid a hand on one of the plugs and twisted it gently. It was not fitted tightly into the pipe and came off easily in his hand. He stopped and peered into the end of the hollow handrail. "Nothing," he said to Leroy.

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Leroy turned to Carol and Helen before he tried the handrail plug on his side of the gangplank. "If you want your jewelry back," he said, "look in there, ladies." He pulled out the teakwood finial from the second handrail.

Helen stooped over and applied an eye to the hollow pipe. When she stepped back, Carol took her place. They looked at each other for a moment and then Carol said, "*Now* who's your favorite detective, Helen?"

Helen answered, "Leroy King. Who else?"

For the rest of the jewels were there.

Later Inspector Lo said, "We shall arrest the thief after your ship sails, when he returns to the dock to recover his loot from this gangplank railing. So you see, you have not only found your jewels, you have caught the thief as well."

"Poor lamb!" said Helen, beginning to feel sorry for the unknown coolie. "All those long years in jail!"

"His sentence should not exceed one year," Lo said quietly.

"What?" said Danforth. "Only one year for grand larceny?"

Lo nodded. "If this thief had succeeded in his robbery, he would have been a rich man," he said. "But since he failed, he still wins second prize, as it were. A jail sentence."

"This is a prize?" Carol asked, confused.

"To be sure. In jail he will have shelter, leisure, companionship, and three good meals a day. That's far better than he can possibly live outside on a painter's wage, you see. And that's why the Judge will give him only one year of this pleasant punishment although he deserves more."

Inspector Lo spread his hands in an Oriental gesture. "For men like this lazy painter, a jail sentence is luxury living. In fact, my friends, here in Hong Kong,"—Inspector Lo smiled shyly—"many of our criminals refer to prison as 'The American Way of Life!' "

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***Coming next month*** *. . . another adventure-in-deduction of Martin Leroy (? Manfred Ellery Lee) and King Danforth (? Queen Dannay) and the case of the extraordinary sports shirt, photographed in Bububu, Zanzibar, which led our favorite criminological collaborators (fictional) to ponder the mystery of . . . but read it for yourself — next month . . .*

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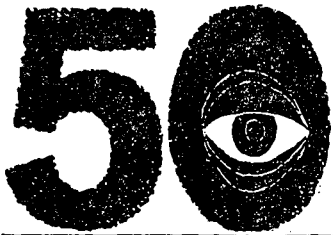


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| 1219 | The China Sea Murders, F. Van Wyck Mason | |
| 1223 | The Gracious Lily Affair<br>F. Van Wyck Mason | |
| 1115 | Two Tickets To Tangiers<br>F. Van Wyck Mason | |
| 1252 | Cairo Intrigue, William Manchester | |
| 2246 | The Lady In The Morgue<br>Johnathan Latimer | |
| 6087 | Black Is For Dying, Johnathan Latimer | |
| 2821 | The Drowning Pool, John Ross MacDonald | |
| 6121 | The Way Some People Die<br>John Ross MacDonald | |
| 1020 | Meet Me At The Morgue<br>John Ross MacDonald | |
| 6030 | Marked For Murder, John Ross MacDonald | |
| 1235 | Big Man, A Fast Man, Benjamin Appel | |
| 1248 | Dishonor Among Thieves, Spencer Dean | |
| 6048 | Price Tag For Murder, Spencer Dean | |
| 1063 | The Case Of The Musical Cow<br>Erle Stanley Gardner | |
| 1107 | The Case Of The Moth-Eaten Mink<br>Erle Stanley Gardner | |
| 1127 | The Case Of The Hesitant Hostess<br>Erle Stanley Gardner | |
| 1170 | The Case Of The Restless Redhead<br>Erle Stanley Gardner | |
| 2544 | The Case Of The Turning Tide<br>Erle Stanley Gardner | |
| 1245 | Substitute Doctor, Elizabeth Seifert | |
| 6029 | Call Girls For Murder, John B. Ethan | |
| 6094 | Murder On Wall Street, John B. Ethan | |
| 6099 | Naked She Died, Don Tracy | |
| 6104 | Mark Kilby Takes A Risk<br>Robert Caine Frazer | |
| 6064 | The Hollywood Hoax, Robert Caine Frazer | |
| 6000 | Mark Kilby And The Secret Syndicate<br>Robert Caine Frazer | |

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# BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

## *recommended by* ANTHONY BOUCHER

The first authentic grand-manner Ellery Queen novel *about* E. Q. in almost six years makes a mystery enthusiast as happy as time travel to the golden days of elaborate deductive detection in the 1930's. ★★★★ THE PLAYER ON THE OTHER SIDE, by Ellery Queen (Random, $3.95) is labyrinthine, inventive, astonishing, fair, meticulous, artificial, improbable and wonderful.

★★★★ **BLACK SISTER,** *by Dagmar Edqvist* (Crime Club, $3.95)

U. S. debut of Swedish novelist (in fine translation by Joan Tate) is many-leveled story of murder and detection in Tanganyika—superior mystery plus acute insight into black-white relationships.

★★★★ **SECONDS,** *by David Ely* (Pantheon, $3.95)

Unclassifiable and compelling suspense-allegory, with a connoisseur-pleasing flavor reminiscent of Ellin's classic "The Specialty of the House" or Ely's own Edgar-winning "The Sailing Club."

★★★★ **HOPJOY WAS HERE,** *by Colin Watson* (Walker, $3.50)

Happy blend of solid detection and wittily absurd parody (of J. Bond) and comment; Crime Writers Association third prize, 1962.

★★★★ **TEN PLUS ONE,** *by Ed McBain* (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

The 87th Precinct in characteristically excellent form, with the puzzle of finding a pattern behind a sniper's "random" kills.

★★★★ **UNDERTOW,** *by Desmond Cory* (Walker, $3.50)

Vivid, glamorous, sexy, violent tale of international intrigue, suggestive of Ian Fleming with far better writing and plotting.

The fall season is off to an unusually strong start, so that a number of good solid three-star books, which would normally be described more fully above, must simply be listed by title: Conrad Voss Bark's MR. HOLMES AT SEA (Macmillan, $3.50), John Creasey's THE SCENE OF THE CRIME (Scribner's, $2.95) and (with his "Jeremy York" by-line) THE MAN I KILLED (Macmillan, $3.50), Edwin Lanham's MONKEY ON A CHAIN (Harcourt, Brace & World, $4.50), Emma Lathen's A PLACE FOR MURDER (Macmillan, $3.95) and John le Carré's A MURDER OF QUALITY (Walker, $3.50).



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# BOX SCORE FOR 1962

In editing his first volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1963 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories as the best short stories and novelettes of 1962, and listed 80 other stories in his Honor Roll—a total of 96 distinguished stories of which 9 were published only in books and 87 appeared in American magazines during 1962.

Here is the box score for the 87 magazine stories:

| *name of magazine* | *number of Honor Roll stories* | *percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine | 38 | 43.6% |
| Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine | 12 | 13.8% |
| The Saint Mystery Magazine | 12 | 13.8% |
| Playboy | 5 | 5.7% |
| Manhunt | 5 | 5.7% |
| Cosmopolitan | 4 | 4.6% |
| Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine | 3 | 3.4% |
| Saturday Evening Post | 2 | 2.3% |
| New Yorker | 2 | 2.3% |
| Argosy | 1 | 1.2% |
| Esquire | 1 | 1.2% |
| Rogue | 1 | 1.2% |
| Baker Street Journal | 1 | 1.2% |



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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 258th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and an extremely readable "first story" it is—wild, hilarious, with an ironic charm and a definite bite.*

*The author was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1931, and spent most of his youth in Hollywood, California. He first became acquainted with the Theater in 1940—and in his own words, he "saw the lights."*

*Back to Cleveland to attend Western Reserve University—four-year hitch in the Navy—B.A. from Allegheny College—M.F.A. from the School of Drama at Yale University—"baptismal fire" as a professional actor in New York, season of 1960-61—now teaching Play Production at the University of Pittsburgh, while finishing work on his Ph.D.—and beginning to write—and you can bet your bottom footlights there will be stories about (to quote Mr. Engel) "the phenomenon at 8:30."*

*Well, we say, let the curtain rise . . .*

# OPERATION MEWKOW

*by BERNERD ENGEL*

I DREAMED HIM UP. YES, SIR, JUST dreamed him up. Just like that. Don't you see, sir? It was a joke—a first-class ALLNAV joke!

I thought of him one day when I was banging away, typing them forms, sir. See, sir? I mean with all them new swabs coming aboard ship—man, we had our hands full in the ADMIN Office, I can tell you, and I kept thinking, wouldn't it be funny if—

You see, sir, Lieutenant Clayghill and I—well, we sort of didn't exactly knock it off together, if you know what I mean, sir. Well, sir, I kept thinking, wouldn't it be funny if he got hisself racked up good?

I mean, can you just imagine the Skipper looking down at him at Captain's Mast, and saying, "Lieutenant Clayghill, there seems to be one more Personnel Record aboard this aircraft carrier than we have men. I want you to go through every one of those three thousand, three hundred and twenty-eight records personally and find that extra record!"

See what I mean, sir?

Man, what a joke that woulda been on Old Clayghill—yes, sir, Lieutenant, sir. And since we were at Brooklyn Navy Yard transferring hundreds of men a day on and off the ship, I figured it would take him



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just about forever to find that extra record. So I decided to give it a try.

At first it was sort of a game, if you know what I mean, sir. "Operation Mewkow." I wasn't really doing anything wrong. If Old—I mean, Lieutenant Clayghill found out, why we'd all have a big laugh over it. Of course he hasn't got much of a sense of humor, you know what I mean, sir. But if anyone did get mad about it, okay so I'd stand a Captain's Mast. I have a four-O record, sir, and I just shipped-over for six more years. Regular Navy, sir! I found a home in the Navy, yes, sir. Anyhow, maybe the Skipper would get a good laugh out of it, see what I mean, sir?

So, there it was. I was staring at a brand-new, clean DD 93 that I just put in the typewriter, and I began to type:

M-E-W-K-O-W, G-e-o-r-g-e M., 786 99 37, SN, USN just like that. Like I knew his name, rate, and service number all along. Then I filled in all the other forms, six carbons of each, all according to the book, sir, just like it says in the Manual. I know how mad Lieutenant Clayghill gets when he spots a form made out wrong, sir, and I didn't want to get into any trouble about that.

You see, sir, George was an orphan, naturally, and he—

What, sir?

Oh, you've looked at his record. Yes, sir.

Well, I signed all the forms myself, as you can see, sir, and that wasn't so easy either, thinking up all those signatures and making them all look different. You can hardly read some of them, but that was okay, and safer too.

Then I came to his pay record. It was then I first thought maybe there could be something in this for me, and if it looked good enough to fool Clayghill—pardon, sir, Lieutenant Clayghill, sir—then maybe I could get a nice piece of change out of the whole caper, you know what I mean, sir?

At first I was going to dump his record just before we sailed, but when I decided to take Mewkow on the eight-month cruise with us, he became less of a joke and more of a full-time job. I knew Lieutenant Clayghill could check just by submitting a sailing list to BUPERS for verification, so I had to send a full copy of George's record to Washington, just to keep things straight. But I figured if they were as fouled up at BUPERS as we were aboard the ship, everything would work out fine.

You can check that out, if you want to, sir. You have? Yes, sir.

Well, about a week before we sailed, I hit on the perfect combination—the best cork-off job on the ship. I found out that Commander Krinch was the Public Information Officer. That's just a side-line job on any ship, as you know, sir. Commander Krinch was actually the Air Intelligence Officer, and I knew he'd

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be too busy once the Air Group came aboard to worry about PIO, so I thought that would be the best billet for me and George.

I asked the Commander if his PIO staff had already been assigned, and when he said no, I volunteered me and George for the job. So I typed a full set of Intermediate Travel Orders for George from GLNTC to our ship via the PIO School at Fort Slocum, and slipped it into his record.

"Where's Mewkow now?" the Commander asks me.

So I says, "He's up at the PIO School, sir. He'll be aboard the day we sail, according to his orders, sir."

Man, he swallowed that chock, chain, and anchor. "Operation Mewkow" was underway.

Commander Krinch found me an emergency radio room on the O-nine level and I set up shop with a typewriter and a varitype machine. Our job—George's and mine, you understand—was to get out a daily mimeograph newspaper once we were at sea, and a weekly rag printed in our own print shop. We would also send out news releases from the ship, like our ports of call and items of interest from the crew for feature stories in home-town newspapers. You might say it was the sweetest little racket aboard ship. I was boss of my own office with practically no interference from the top brass. No offense, sir. Yes, sir, you know what I mean, sir.

I hopped over to Bayonne Navy Yard and bought George a complete sea bag and had it sent over to the ship by cab. I figured as long as he was going to turn all his pay chits over to me at the end of the cruise, the least I could do was to buy him a full sea bag, complete with every item and all stenciled with his name. Right, sir? Mewkow's sea bag came aboard the same morning we sailed for the Med.

Once we were at sea, George and me started our daily routine. I would contact the Commander at least once a day, usually in the afternoon, because we never had to make muster in the morning, and could sack-in. I figured, that way he'd never have to look for us.

George liked sleeping up in the office because it was naturally more private than bunking in an overcrowded compartment. He would always be in the shower when anyone asked for him, and he wouldn't come back to change his skivvies until everybody else had gone. Since George only used his locker in the compartment to stow and change his clothes, I talked the boys out of putting him on the clean-up detail.

No matter what I did in the morning, George would go straight to the office and stay there. At twenty-hundred he always went to the movie, no matter what was playing, while I finished whatever work *he* didn't get done. Sometimes he'd shoot craps in the sail locker with the bo'suns, but when I found out that a couple of the photo boys

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wanted in on the game, George suddenly started to play Acey-Deucy in the machine shop. Then again, sir, you might find him playing cribbage with the radio gang. You see, George was never one to be where you expected to find him. You know what I mean, sir?

Well, for our first few weeks at sea, our routine worked out pretty good, and at the first pay call—just before we hit Lisbon—I couldn't help being kind of proud when I checked the pay list and saw

MEWKOW, George M. . . . . $96.36

George was doing such a good job of keeping out of everybody's hair that I bought him a box of cigars, and smoked every one of them myself.

But one day, about thirteen-hundred, I was flaked out on the flight deck getting a little sun, when over the bull-horn I hear: "Mewkow, Mewkow. Report to Air Intelligence Officer."

Man, you never seen a sailor tear down ladders so fast in your life! I had to beat George down there! You see what I mean, sir?

I busted right into the office without knocking.

"Where's Mewkow?" says the Commander.

"I was just on my way up here anyway," I says. "Is there anything I could tell him for you, sir?"

"No, nothing important," says the Commander. "I want him to type this letter over, that's all. He's got a dozen misspelled words here, and this is going to COMAIRLANT."

So I grabs the letter right out of his hand and says, "I'll take it, sir, and personally retype the letter myself!" And I beat it out of there.

Man, I knew I had to do something fast to keep George a member of the crew in good standing. So I began to develop Phase II of Operation Mewkow.

I started to send George letters. In Naples I bought a dozen different kinds of nice stationery, and a dozen different bottles of froo-froo to go with them. I'd take the letters down to the post office just before I knew they were transferring mail off the ship and I'd ask the mail clerk if I could stick the letters in the sack myself. In that way I avoided having the postmark of the ship on them, and they were all stamped FPO New York when George received them.

Pretty clever, huh, sir? Yes, *sir!*

Well, sir, then I started the phone campaign. George began making a few phone calls every day. He had to call Commander Krinch and Meyer, the printer, on business, and he annoyed the boys in the post office asking about the next mail call. I tell you, sir, I had some bad times on that phone, especially when somebody called *him*. I had to put a list next to the phone so's I'd remember what George said to who!

Then I started a full-scale manhunt for Mewkow. I'd call the print shop and ask for George. Naturally,

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I was surprised when he hadn't shown up there. I'd run into the AI Office and ask the yeoman, "Where is that goof-off, Mewkow?" If I bumped into anybody I knew in the passageway, I'd stop and ask if they'd seen Mewkow. I even had him paged over the bull-horn two or three times a day.

"Mewkow, Mewkow. Report to PIO Office."

"Mewkow, Mewkow. Call the radio shack."

"Mewkow, Mewkow. Dial 371."

Then I'd call 371 myself and say, "This is Mewkow, talking. And some guy on the other end would say, "I didn't call you, you crazy meat-head!" and hang up on me.

But the best move of all was when I was talking to someone. I'd stop and say, "There goes Mewkow now. I've been looking for that bum all day." And then I'd take off after some swab just climbing down a ladder or stepping through a hatch.

Well sir, one day it happened.

Just like that.

We'd been at sea on patrol for thirty-three days straight, and everybody was kind of moody, you know what I mean, sir. I was looking for George, as usual, down in the machine shop. I asked Schmegelsky if he'd seen Mewkow, and he says, "Yeah, he was here a minute ago."

Just like that!

"You mean George Mewkow was here?" I says, and he says, "Yeah, I thought I saw him walk into the shop, kinda out of the corner of my eye, but when I turned around again, he was gone."

Man, that shook me up, I can tell you, sir.

I started up to the photo lab and stopped Dubrow on the ladder, and I asked him if he'd seen Mewkow.

And he says, "Sure. I just passed him. I think he ducked into the crew's lounge."

After that, I really *had* to find that slippery bum. When I got to the lounge, someone thought they had seen George sitting in the corner reading the *Christian Science Monitor*, but there was nobody sitting in the corner.

I dialed the AI Office. Commander Krinch answers.

"Is Mewkow up there, sir?" I asks.

"What's the matter with that blasted moron?" he says. "You tell him the next time I see him I'll lock his neck in an X fitting and dog it down. I just saw him heading down the ladder and I shouted to him, but he didn't pay any attention and just kept going down!"

I don't remember, but I think I hung up on the Commander, sir. I called the print shop as fast as I could dial 987. I asked Meyer if George was down there.

And he answers, "Just a minute, I think I just saw him go into the darkroom. You want to talk to him?"

That did it.

I hung up, went down to sick bay, got a couple of APC's, and crawled into my sack. You see, sir, Phase III

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of Operation Mewkow had begun —and I wasn't even ready!

Everybody began to feel sorry for me because I had to put up with a no-good son-of-a-slob like Mewkow. I began feeling sorry for myself. Why shouldn't I? I had to do all his sloppy typing over and over again. Sometimes I had to be up all night catching up on all the work. Why, I looked after that bum just like he was my own brother. I put his laundry away for him. I stood in the ship's service line for his razor blades, tooth paste, ice cream, and cigars. I had to pick up his mail and take phone messages for him. I even had to shine his shoes and press his whites when he wanted to go on liberty.

Only one thing made the time pass easier. Every two weeks I'd go down to check on my investment.

MEWKOW, George M.... $770.88

and later

MEWKOW, George M.....$1,349.04

All that cash piling up on the books, sir—it sure was a pretty sight.

Then I began thinking: how I was going to get my hooks on all that dough? It was a cinch I couldn't get it myself. You know, sir, you have to stand in line by alphabetical order and sign a pay chit in front of the paymaster. It would mean that I would have to get somebody else to stand in line and sign that chit. And I didn't want to cut anybody else in, you know what I mean, sir. This was just between George and I.

A couple of nights out of our last port I settled it. I'd had a lot of fun out of the caper, and George and me didn't want to get into any real trouble by trying to collect his back pay. So I decided I wasn't going to try for it, and what's more, I was going to get rid of old George forever.

So I put through a leave chit to commence as soon as the gangway was over in home port, and George just would never come back. He'd go AWOL, and let the FBI have some fun for a while trying to catch up with him.

The last night at sea I packed all Mewkow's gear in his sea bag and weighted it down and dragged it to the fantail and threw it overboard. I really hated to give George the deep six, just like that. He was the only real buddy I had during the whole cruise.

I guess you know the rest, sir. Yes, sir, *I was charged with murder*—the murder of George Mewkow, 786 99 37, SN, USN.

Witnesses at the General Court Martial all knew Mewkow—every single one of them.

Mewkow had borrowed money from some and lent money to others. He even won the anchor pool at Marseilles.

Some said they went to early Sunday Catholic Mass with him. But he was also seen at Protestant Services and at Friday night Jewish Services, and one witness insisted George was a Buddhist.

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Everyone knew George had the loudest laugh whenever a Hollywood starlet appeared on the movie screen.

Judging by the variety of cheaply perfumed letters that passed through their hands, the mail clerks said that George had more girl friends than any other man aboard ship.

Boudreau, a barber, described George as having curly black hair. Skinner, another barber, said Mewkow's hair was straight and kind of blondish-reddish-brownish.

Meyer, the printer, testified that George brought down the paste-up every single Friday—never missed one week—and remained in the darkroom until every plate was made.

The boys in the laundry said he had the cleanest clothes they ever had to handle—almost as if they were never worn.

Ryan, a radioman, said George was so tall he practically had to double over in order to pass through the hatches. Schmegelsky, the machinest, said George was so short he had to stand on a box to see the dice during a crap game.

Commander Krinch said George was not only a slow typist but that his spelling was atrocious.

And the Captain of the great vessel testified that George handed him the daily newspaper every morning, almost before he opened his eyes.

In short, the witnesses agreed that Mewkow was the tallest, shortest, darkest, blondest, fastest, slowest, cleanest, dirtiest, fattest, skinniest, loudest, quietest, weakest, strongest, smartest, dumbest man aboard ship.

Lieutenant Clayghill testified that he saw the accused throw a heavy object over the side that last night at sea, and after apprehending the accused with a flying tackle, the Lieutenant dutifully sounded the Man Overboard Alarm.

Though the ship repeatedly circled the area, the object had gone down like a stone. The Captain called for a full ship's muster to determine if anybody was missing. Naturally, the only man who didn't answer the muster was—MEWKOW, George M., 786 99 37, SN, USN.

The charge was murder in the first degree.

After working feverishly for six months, the FBI reported that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the personnel file for MEWKOW, George M., 786 99 37, SN, USN, was a fraud.

Military courts-martial, unlike comparable civilian trials, are apt to have far-reaching consequences for all those who have participated. The Navy has learned that by neutralizing the turbulence, the ship can move through deep water with greater stability. In other words, "Those who make waves are eliminated!"

Lieutenant Clayghill, for example, is now on an extended tour of duty, commanding an observation outpost on Ice Island X-14, somewhere near

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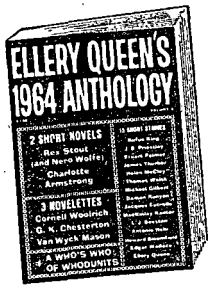
the North Pole. It is expected that this experience will sharpen his eyesight.

Commander Krinch, it is said, now prepares coffee three times a day for the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington.

The former Captain of the 42,000-ton aircraft carrier is now making an exhaustive study as to what percentage of the capital ships of the U.S. Navy scrape the paint from their sides while passing through the locks of the Panama Canal.

And the accused? He was tried by the Court of Military Appeals for falsifying records; it was recommended that his sentence begin at the time he was first taken into custody during the "murder" investigation. You can now find him, nearly every day, riding the surf or sipping sloe gin on the terrace of his private apartment. You see, he is attached to the staff at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, in charge of the Rest and Rehabilitation Program for officers suffering from fatigue. He has found a home in the Navy. Yes, sir!

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***Be Your Own Detective!***

# SEVEN DEAD WOMEN:

## *Who Killed Ruby Mae Potter?*

*by EDWARD D. RADIN*

HER BEDROOM MADE IT CLEAR TO deputies on the staff of Sheriff Bud Cash that Ruby Mae Potter, 42-year-old widow, had been seeking romance. Instead, she had met death on a mountain road some 20 miles from her home in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Propped up among many jars of beauty preparations on top of her dresser were photographs of three different men, varying widely in age. And nearby, on the wall, was a calendar on which a large heart had been drawn in red crayon around the date of February 14—St. Valentine's Day.

The victim's body, clad in a sweater and gray slacks, had been found Monday morning, February 10, 1947, in some weeds at the edge of a creek. She had been shot twice at extremely close range, once in the right shoulder, and once at the base of the skull. Physicians estimated she had died between midnight Sunday and 1 A.M.

There were bloodstains on the front seat of her sedan which was slued sideways across the mountain road. The spot suggested a trysting place and officials reasoned she'd been murdered by one of her suitors.

The victim's landlady supplied some background information. Widowed some years earlier after only five weeks of marriage, Ruby had rarely gone out until the past year, when she finally emerged from her shell and began dating. At 6 P.M. the night of the murder she had received a phone call and when the landlady saw her shortly afterward, Ruby was dancing happily about her apartment. She drove off alone about an hour later.

Officers were able to identify the three men in the photographs. One was Jim Williams, a husky man of 25, recently released from the army.

Neighbors said he had been a frequent visitor until the past few months when his place seemed to be taken by Frank Rhodes, a slender mechanic of Ruby's age, who worked in the same yarn plant where she had been employed.

The third was Frank Case, a stout merchant in his late fifties. He rarely came to Ruby's apartment.

*© 1958 by Hearst Publishing Co. Inc.; originally titled, "The Widow's Last Date"*



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Rhodes became the prime suspect when officers learned he had been with Ruby early Sunday night in a restaurant only a few miles from the murder scene. An excited waitress told police he had looked sullen, as if he had been quarreling with the widow.

The mechanic readily admitted he was the man seen by the waitress. "Sure, I was mad," Rhodes told his questioners. "Ruby and I have a regular date every Sunday night but this time she said she would have to call it off early because she had another appointment. She wouldn't tell me who it was. I didn't think that was right because she knew I wanted to marry her."

After some prodding, he added reluctantly that Ruby had not given him a definite answer to his proposal.

Rhodes claimed that after leaving the restaurant, Ruby drove back to Chattanooga where she dropped him off and he was in bed before midnight. Members of his family confirmed this. He admitted he had telephoned Ruby on Sunday, but not at 6 P.M.

Jim Williams explained to the authorities that he had met Ruby at a dance while he was still in the army. He drifted away from Ruby after meeting Nellie Sue Smith Hardin, a girl closer to his own age.

He and Nellie were engaged to be married soon and they had been together all day Sunday until 2:30 A.M. Questioned separately, Nellie, a pert 19-year-old redhead, confirmed his alibi. "Ma gave me the dickens for getting home so late," the girl giggled.

Case, a widower, told deputies Ruby knew his grown children did not want him to remarry. "I would see her when business brought me to Chattanooga. We'd maybe have dinner out and go to a movie. I guess we were just two lonely people."

He claimed he had been home alone Sunday night, but couldn't prove it.

Unable to make any further headway, the deputies consulted Sheriff Cash.

"Considering your analysis of the personality of the murdered woman," he told them, "we can figure out who told a false story."

*How good a detective are you? You have the essential facts Sheriff Cash had in this actual case from official files. Who killed Ruby Mae Potter? . . . You will find the real-life solution on page 109.*

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*Do you remember the first big case (EQMM, June 1955) investigated by the private detective agency of Blair & Perkins, teenage 'tecs? It was "a simple incident" involving blackmail, theft, slander, and miscellaneous mischiefs among the older teenagers—and all, you will recollect, without the slightest taint of what is commonly referred to as juvenile delinquency . . . Then there was the second big case (EQMM, March 1959) of Blair & Perkins, Boy Sleuths, which told "the truth about Ronald"—well, at least part of the truth. And now more of the truth about Ronald and others (in the town where Tom Sawyer, the Rover Boys, and Penrod might have lived) will be learned in this, the Fifth Big Case of Blair & Perkins, and easily the most monumental mystery of their criminological careers.*

*The third and fourth cases? Now, there are a pair of mysteries! Perhaps the time may come when it will be safe to reveal the desperate and dangerous events which engaged the brains and brawn of our young heroes in the two missing mysteries—yes, perhaps some day those stupendous secrets can be made a matter of public record. In the meantime . . .*

# THE GREAT HALLOWEEN MYSTERY; or, Blair & Perkins' Fifth Big Case

*by LEE SHERIDAN COX*

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WILLIE Perkins and I have had since we went into the detective business has been our parents. Usually they don't know much about our lives. But every time we get a little fame they kick up a fuss. After our fourth big case, when Willie and I caught the thief from Chicago, Mr. Schmidt, and got our names in the paper, you'd have thought Willie and I had thrown a baseball through Aunt Gertrude's window or dropped a hydrogen bomb. Here we'd succeeded in protecting the town from a Public Enemy, and yet the way my dad carried on, you couldn't tell whether the Public Enemy was Mr. Schmidt or me. And Willie's dad came within an inch of giving him a paddling.

It just shows you can't please everybody.

Our parents are dead set against our getting successful and famous. But if you want to be great, you can't let anything discourage you. And as Willie says, some day when



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we are recognized as the greatest detectives in the world, maybe our fathers will apologize for making things so tough for us. But in the meantime their attitude has created a problem. They said that they didn't want to hear any more about our being in the detective business, and it has certainly cramped our style to have to keep them from hearing about it.

What I'm getting at is why Willie and I didn't completely solve our fifth big case. Ronald Pruitt, a creep in our grade at school, is always trying to run Willie and me down as detectives. But actually the only mystery that ever stumped Willie and me was our fifth big case. And it really wasn't our fault. Because of our dads being so mad at us for catching Mr. Schmidt, the big thief from Chicago, we couldn't investigate the mystery properly, and because of William Henry Winningham we were under a constant mental strain on the night of the robbery when we would otherwise have been on the alert.

Besides, though Willie and I have had some real funny cases, our fifth big case was the funniest. Sometimes I think that maybe there really is an invisible man—like that man on television—and that he was in our town on Halloween night. Even at that, we made some good deductions and returned all the loot to its owners. However, nobody knew what we did, except the Geronimo gang and all the kids in the neighborhood.

To start at the beginning, Willie and I always spend a lot of time figuring out how to dress up on Halloween so that we can either scare people to death or tickle them to death. But on this Halloween we were especially interested in our costumes because Mr. Bolger was having a party for all the kids in the neighborhood early in the evening before we started trick-or-treating and he was giving a prize for the best disguise. He said that it would be a short party, just long enough so that he could see everybody at once and not keep having to open the door all evening. And Ronald Pruitt had told everybody that he had a keen disguise and was going to show Willie and me up. So we really worked on what we were going to wear.

I decided to be a pirate. I made a cutlass out of beaverboard and painted it silver, and I wore a wide red silk scarf around my waist to hold up the cutlass. In a trunk in the attic I found a brown wig which my brother Pete had worn in a play about the Revolutionary War. At first, I wasn't going to wear it for fear it was sissy-looking, but Willie said it made me look repulsive, so I wore it. I wore short ragged pants and a striped sweater and boots.

But the best part was the scar. I had to practice making it ahead of time. I drew this line down my face and across my lip which I fixed to

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turn upside down with Scotch tape. Then I put brown dye all over my face to hide the Scotch tape. And I drew fish and stars and daggers on my arms for tattoo marks and put brown dye all over me. If Willie and I hadn't had bad luck, it's a cinch I would have won the prize. I sure did look horrible.

Willie's disguise was good, too. He wore a big baggy clown suit with great big flapping shoes. The best thing was that he had a nose with a little wire running to a battery in his pocket. Every time he pressed a button his nose lit up. I never saw anything so funny in my life. The first time I saw it, I almost died it was so funny.

But as it turned out, we might as well have just put on false faces. First, it took me a lot longer to get ready that night than I had thought it would. My lip wouldn't turn down right, and the tattooing and the dye took longer than it did in practice. However, I finally had it done and even my dad approved. He said I looked God-awful. He was drinking a cup of coffee when I came down the stairs and when he saw me, he swallowed the wrong way and almost choked to death. He said he never saw a worse sight in all his life. But it took me a long time to get that way.

Then when I got to Willie's he wasn't ready. It wasn't Willie's fault. It turned out that William Henry Winningham's mother had called up to ask whether William Henry could go out with Willie and me. And of all the dumb things to say, Willie's mother had said we'd be glad to take William Henry along. I don't know where she got the idea. Willie had done his best to explain how a little kid like William Henry would ruin our whole evening, and he was still trying to make his mother see reason when I got there. But she said if Willie didn't take William Henry, Willie couldn't go, and if Willie wasn't nice to William Henry, she would take Willie in hand when he got home. You can see the kind of thing Willie and I are up against all the time.

Anyway, finally Willie got his disguise on, though he spent so much time complaining that it took quite a while. I wasn't saying anything about taking William Henry, and Willie's mother said why couldn't Willie be nice about it the way I was. Parents never understand anything. The only reason I wasn't griping too was that I was afraid my scar would come undone. When we left, Willie was feeling pretty low. He lit up his nose a couple of times in front of the mirror, but even that didn't cheer him up. He said he had a feeling it was going to be a terrible evening.

Then when we finally got to William Henry's, he was missing. This is the way William Henry is all the time. His mother said he had been waiting for us on the front steps, and if we left without him, he would be broken-hearted. William

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Henry heals easy, and we weren't too worried about his heart, but Willie was afraid of being taken in hand if we didn't make some effort to help find William Henry.

So we looked around outside his house, and finally behind a bush by the front walk we saw a small ghost lying flat on its back with its toes pointing straight up, which had to be William Henry because this is the way he looks when he thinks he's been killed.

Well, William Henry's mother kept trying to bring him to, and Willie and I were getting desperate because it was so late. Then I got an idea and told William Henry that he couldn't be shot because he was a ghost and already dead. So William Henry popped right up. But then he saw me in my disguise, and he had one of his nervous fits and his mother had to tell him about twenty-five times that it was me. Sometimes I think that William Henry isn't all there.

He told us that it was Ronald Pruitt who had shot him with a space gun, and he said Ronald had a big fish bowl on his head, which scared Willie and me because if William Henry was right, Ronald was dressed like an astronaut, and if we didn't hurry up and get to Mr. Bolger's, Ronald was sure to win the prize with an outfit like that.

And that's exactly what happened. We couldn't walk fast because of Willie's big shoes and because of William Henry's legs, which are only five years old and short. And when we finally got to Mr. Bolger's, sure enough Ronald Pruitt had just been awarded the prize, which was a neat pocket watch with an orange cat on the back of the case. He would never have won if Willie and I had got there on time. All the kids said so. Betsy Miller said that I was the ugliest thing she'd ever seen. Ronald couldn't hold a candle to Willie and me, but he had the watch and he stood around in his space suit acting as if he had been to the moon and back. One good thing though, Mr. Bolger had cider and doughnuts for refreshments and without help Ronald couldn't get the glass bowl off his head to eat. Nobody helped him.

When the refreshments were gone, Willie and William Henry and I left to go trick-or-treating. Willie and I usually have a lot of fun on Halloween, because nobody ever knows who we are. But this Halloween turned out a bust all around. We were still griping when we left Mr. Bolger's about Ronald getting the prize, and the subject made such an impression on William Henry that from then on all evening he never let us forget that Ronald had beat us out of a watch. Whatever mind William Henry has is one-track. Besides, everywhere we went William Henry got all the attention, just because he's three feet tall and his brain hasn't developed yet.

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We went first to my Aunt Gertrude's, who had always before been a lot of fun to visit on Halloween because she is always impressed with Willie's and my disguises and never recognizes us. But when we rang the doorbell and she opened the door, the first person she saw was William Henry because he started right in. So Aunt Gertrude squealed and said, "Oh, it's a ghost. Oh, dear, it's a ghost," and with William Henry scooting after her she ran through the hall to where Uncle Cyrus was sitting.

"Look, Cyrus, it's a ghost," she said.

Uncle Cyrus, who was watching the Mystery of the Week on television, said, "So it is."

And all Aunt Gertrude could admire was William Henry, who was laughing and chasing her around saying, "Don't be afraid. It's me. It's William Henry," and she kept pretending that she really thought he was a ghost until William Henry caught her and said, "It's really William Henry. I won't hurt you." Then he said, "Don't be afraid of the pirate. It's only Andy. And that's Willie."

Willie and I could have killed him. That's what you get for taking a little kid with you who doesn't know how to act in front of grownups.

Aunt Gertrude couldn't exclaim over William Henry enough. "You really take the prize, William Henry," she said. "Doesn't he, Cyrus? Doesn't he take the prize?"

Uncle Cyrus, who was still watching the mystery, said he did.

Willie lit up his nose several times and I swung my cutlass around, but it didn't do a bit of good. William Henry was all Aunt Gertrude could talk about. And he was only a ghost. It doesn't take any brains to put on a sheet. And while Aunt Gertrude was getting us some cookies and candy to put in our trick-or-treat bags, William Henry kept saying to Willie and me, "I took the prize. Ronald Pruitt didn't take the prize. I took the prize." Willie and I were ignoring him and watching the play on television with Uncle Cyrus, but it doesn't do any good to ignore William Henry, because he never knows you're doing it.

"I took the prize, didn't I, Andy and Willie?" he kept saying. "Old Ronald Pruitt didn't take it."

Willie's mother might have tried to realize that William Henry would spoil our whole evening—because everywhere we went it was the same story. You'd think that no one had ever seen a ghost before. And William Henry always told people who he was and who we were, even though we kept telling him he wasn't supposed to. And everywhere we went William Henry kept saying, "Do I take the prize?" and everybody laughed and said he certainly did.

And we didn't get to go to nearly as many houses as usual because William Henry was always getting behind tables and chairs to boo at

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people or running away into some other part of the house to make ghost noises. We kept having to wait for him to come back from somewhere. And then all the time we were walking to another house, William Henry talked and talked about how he was a scary ghost and how he took the prize. Willie and I were really mad at Willie's mother.

You might think things couldn't get any worse. But they did. William Henry suddenly announced when we were at least three blocks from his house that he was tired and he was sleepy and his bag was too heavy and his feet hurt and he wanted to go home and he couldn't walk any more. So I had to carry him, and he accidentally knocked my Scotch tape loose so that my scar came undone. That's when I knew the whole evening was a washout. Willie had to carry all the bags, and he said it was no wonder William Henry was tired. He said that William Henry's trick-or-treat bag weighed about a ton and everybody must have given him twice as much candy as they gave us. So there we were, me loaded down with William Henry, and Willie loaded down with the bags and hardly able to walk in his floppy shoes, when the worst thing of all happened. We were robbed.

Suddenly, about a block from William Henry's house, three figures with handkerchiefs over their noses and chins stepped out of the dark driveway by Jackie Carr's house, a big dog jumping behind them.

"Stand and deliver," said one of them.

"What do you mean?" said Willie.

Then one of them grabbed Willie around the arms from behind, and the other two took the bags he was carrying.

"Cut it out," said Willie. "Those belong to Andy and William Henry and me. Give them back."

"We're robbing the rich to give to the poor," said one of them.

"We're not the rich," I said.

But the highwaymen put the bags in their bike baskets and rode away as fast as they could, the big dog following them.

"We'll get you," we yelled. "Just you wait. We'll catch you!"

Willie and I were so mad it's a wonder *we* didn't have a fit. I hadn't been able to do a thing to defend ourselves, what with William Henry asleep and hanging around my neck practically choking me. And in his big shoes Willie couldn't put up any kind of fight. It was humiliating.

Well, we delivered William Henry to his mother and told her how we'd been robbed by a gang of highwaymen. William Henry woke up long enough to tell his mother that he'd taken all the prizes, but the last we saw of him he was sound asleep. It's a good thing in a way that William Henry slept through the robbery. The way he reacts to things, the shock of seeing a thief would have put him in a coma for days.

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Willie and I walked around for a while after that looking for the highwaymen, but we didn't see them again. So finally we went home. It was the most disgusting Halloween I ever spent.

The next day, which was Saturday, everybody in the neighborhood was talking about the robbers. They had held up Freddie Clark and Hubert Welsh and Jackie Carr and Morris Somers and Ronald Pruitt and everybody. But worst of all, everybody in the neighborhood was finding articles missing from their houses.

Freddie Clark's watch had disappeared. Jackie Carr's grandfather couldn't find a silver paper knife which he always kept on his desk. Hubert Welsh said his mother was turning the house upside down looking for a little silver clock.—And other things were missing, including Uncle Cyrus' great-grandfather's gold watch.

My dad said at lunch that this time the tricksters had gone too far and that taking a gold watch was no prank. He said somebody ought to find those little ruffians who had taken everybody's trick-or-treat bags and had stolen all this stuff before they got into worse trouble. When I remarked that the town obviously needed two good detectives, my dad told me that I was not to get mixed up in any of these shenanigans. My dad really gets tough when it comes to shenanigans. So there we were, Willie and I, with a real big case of theft looking us right in the eyes, and we weren't supposed to get mixed up in it.

Well, Willie and I talked it over and we came to the conclusion that it was our duty to get mixed up. Somebody had to catch those little ruffians before they got into worse trouble. Only we decided that we'd better investigate as unnoticeably as possible. So we called together Freddie and Jackie and Hubert and Morris and explained our problem and asked them to divide up and go all over the neighborhood making a list of people who had articles missing.

Then Willie and I went to Aunt Gertrude's. We pretended we were just making a friendly call, but we were really after was a clue to the identity of the highwaymen. There was a possibility that even Aunt Gertrude might have noticed something about them which Willie and I hadn't been able to see in the dark.

But we couldn't ask questions, for fear our dads would hear that we were detecting, so we didn't find out anything helpful. Aunt Gertrude was hunting for Uncle Cyrus' watch and set us to work helping her. She said she knew all the children in the neighborhood and none of them would take a watch, so it had to be somewhere in the house. She said she knew Uncle Cyrus and he would lose his head if he could. But Willie and I knew that the highwaymen weren't from our neighborhood, because all the

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kids in our neighborhood had been robbed.

So Willie and I left Aunt Gertrude still looking for the watch and went back to our detective agency, which is in my garage. Freddie and the others were there with the list of houses that had been robbed.

"How are you going to find out who the thieves are?" said Jackie Carr.

Willie and I didn't admit it because we had a reputation to hold up, but we didn't know what we were going to do. Nobody had recognized the highwaymen. And though all of us had been in every house that was on the list, nobody had seen the highwaymen in any of the robbed houses. So I just said that Willie and I had to think for a while, but they could count on us to get the loot back, since if anybody could figure out who the thieves were, it was us.

"How can we figure out who the thieves are when we don't even have a clue?" said Willie, when the others had left.

"And how can we get clues when we can't ask even questions?" I said.

We were feeling pretty gloomy.

"What makes me the maddest," said Willie, "is losing those trick-or-treat bags without even putting up a fight. If I hadn't had those shoes on, I don't care if there were three of them and that big dog, I would have—"

"Willie!" I said. "The clue. The dog. Who was that big dog?"

We got really excited. You can't disguise a dog. We sat and thought about all the big dogs we knew.

Finally Willie said sort of slow, "I think it was Greatheart Jones."

He was right. As soon as he said it, I knew he was right. And we weren't happy about it, even though we had made a terrific deduction. Because now we knew who the highwaymen were.

"Let's give up the case," said Willie. "I don't care if we don't solve it."

At first, I almost agreed with him. If it had turned out to be some creep like Perry Swanson or Ronald Pruitt's brother Bertie, it would have been all right, but I hated to think that we were going to have to turn Rufus and Dreyfus Jones in to the police. Everybody, except mothers, admires Rufus and Dreyfus. They can stay under water longer than anybody else in town. They aren't afraid of anything. One of the greatest sights I ever saw was Rufus and Dreyfus riding on their bicycles down Main Street in the middle of traffic. They were standing on their heads at the time. My Aunt Gertrude said once that it was a good thing the Jones twins' father is a doctor, because their broken bones would bankrupt anybody who wasn't a thief.

You can see why Willie and I didn't want Rufus and Dreyfus arrested, but then I thought of Uncle Cyrus' great-grandfather's watch. And I told Willie it seemed to

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me we had to concentrate on the fact that the twins were robbers and ignore the fact that they were the best high divers in town. So we decided that the thing to do was to go to the clubhouse of the Geronimo gang and do some detecting. We didn't want to turn Rufus and Dreyfus over to the police until we were absolutely sure they had taken the loot.

At this time, two years ago, the Geronimoes were all in the eighth grade, three years ahead of Willie and me, who were in the fifth grade. All the Geronimoes were daring and tough, but I'd never heard of their doing anything that wasn't honest. Rufus and Dreyfus were their chiefs, and they had a clubhouse in the woods behind the Jones house.

So Willie and I headed for the Jones house, which as everybody knows is out at the edge of town. We left our bikes beside the road, climbed a fence, and cut through the woods. Since it was the middle of a Saturday afternoon and therefore the gang might be in the clubhouse, Willie and I planned to reconnoiter it pretty cautiously.

The day was hot for the first of November, and very sunny and still. We couldn't hear anything except wood noises, and the clubhouse at first sight looked empty. But if there's one thing about Willie and me, it's that we're careful when we're out detecting. So we circled around through the trees, and there, on the other side of the clubhouse, three bicycles were parked.

The clubhouse door had about ten padlocks hanging on it, all unfastened, and there were scary signs all over the door like *Indian Reservation*, *Keep Out*, *Danger*, *Stop While You've Got the Whites of Your Eyes*, *Scientific Experiments Going On*, *Head Shrinking Done While You Wait*, and various other warnings. But if there's one thing about Willie and me, it's that we don't let anything stop us when we're out detecting. We crawled on our stomachs through the brush up to a little window at the back of the clubhouse. Then very silently we stood up, peeped in, and got the shock of our lives.

The first thing I saw was Uncle Cyrus' great-grandfather's gold watch and Mr. Carr's paper knife. The loot was scattered all over a table in the middle of the room, and there beside the table were Rufus Jones and Teddy Simpkins, and Michael Antonelli. And the next thing I saw, which was about one second later, was Greatheart coming out from beneath the table and barking at the window.

Willie and I dodged down but not fast enough. The Geronimoes had whirled around and seen us, and as Willie and I took off through the woods, we heard their war whoop, which is enough to take your hair right off your head all by itself.

Willie and I ran faster than we'd ever run in our lives with the Geronimoes right after us, yelling

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like wild Indians. Willie said later that if anybody had held a stop watch on us, he bet we'd have the world's record for kids our age. You don't waste any time if a thief is chasing you making a blood-curdling noise. And even though the Geronimoes are three years older than we are, and bigger, Willie and I might have got away we were going so fast, but all of a sudden the yell started up ahead of us.

Dreyfus and Alex Yeardley were approaching from the direction we were heading toward. Willie and I didn't have a chance. We turned to the right and jumped a creek, but then the yell began to sound on all sides of us. They had us surrounded and then they closed in. Willie and I put up a good fight and managed to shove Teddy Simpkins in the creek, but they got us down in the leaves and sat on us and tied us up. Then they ran some poles under the ropes and carried us back to the clubhouse. They didn't say anything. All they did was yell. It was enough to freeze your blood solid.

In the clubhouse they put each of us in a chair, and then they stood in a circle around the chairs and stared at us with their arms folded and not saying a word. It wasn't only scary. It was mixed up. I kept having the feeling that Willie and I were the crooks, instead of them. If it hadn't been for Greatheart, who kept walking back and forth between the Geronimoes and us, I would probably have fainted dead away. Dogs are always comfortable to have around. But I was plenty scared, and Willie said later that he thought his time had come.

The Geronimoes stared and stared at us and didn't say a word. Willie and I didn't say anything either. What is there to talk about when you're all tied up, waiting to be scalped?

Finally, Rufus said to Willie, who was white as a sheet, "You, Paleface, why are you here?"

"You brought me here," said Willie.

Rufus frowned. "Why were you hanging around here?" he said to me.

"We're detecting," I said, "because we're detectives. We recognized Greatheart last night."

"They're not so dumb," said Teddy. "Maybe they *are* the ones."

"If they're the ones," said Dreyfus, "they *are* dumb."

"I still say they aren't the ones," said Rufus.

Willie rolled his eyes at me. We both thought that the Geronimoes had all gone crazy.

"What ones?" said Willie.

"We came to get the bags you took from us last night," I said.

"Is a little candy so important?" said Rufus.

"It was our candy," said Willie. "It was Andy's and William Henry's and my candy."

"Besides," I said, getting up my courage, "we're investigating you. We're looking for missing objects.

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And there they are. And we'll have to turn you in."

"Says who?" said Teddy Simpkins.

"Listen to him!" said Mike Antonelli.

"Wait a minute," said Rufus.

"Let's get to the bottom of this," said Dreyfus.

"Now Andy and Willie," said Rufus, "we didn't think that you were the thieving type."

"But," said Dreyfus, "all the stolen things were either in one of the bags we took from you or in the bag we took from Ronald Pruitt."

"Well, they weren't in our bags," said Willie. "We're detectives. We're on the side of the law."

"I think they're innocent," said Dreyfus. "But I can't imagine Ronald Pruitt stealing that stuff either."

"It's got to be them or Ronald," said Teddy.

"If it's between us and Ronald, then it's Ronald," I said. "But you took a lot of bags."

"We were organized," said Alex Yeardley. "The three from you and the one from Ronald were the last ones collected. The others had already been delivered."

"Don't talk too much," said Dreyfus.

"You guys sound suspicious to me," said Willie, who wasn't nervous now that the yelling and staring were over. "I'm going to report at the police station that you took the bags and you have the loot. Even though I don't want to," he added.

The Geronimoes looked at him.

"I believe them," said Dreyfus.

"Then it has to be Ronald Pruitt who is the one," said Teddy.

"Why did you take the bags?" I said. "That was stealing. That's not ethical."

The Geronimoes looked embarrassed.

"Let's tell them," said Alex. "I don't want anybody going around thinking I'm a thief."

So then Rufus told us about this boy who lives out in the country and how he never has any fun because he's been sick in bed a long time and how when they had gone with their father to see him, they had told him in private that the trickers and the treaters would remember him on Halloween, and so they organized.

"We'd carried out about ten bags," said Dreyfus, "when Rufus and Mike and Alex brought in the last ones from you and Ronald to the clubhouse for Teddy and me to deliver. And that's when we found the gold watch and other stuff. We've been trying to figure out how to find out who the thief was and how to return the stolen goods without getting involved."

"Well, we aren't the one," I said. "I never knew Ronald Pruitt was a thief, but I always knew he'd come to some bad end."

"Imagine that," said Willie. "We're going to get to put Ronald

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in jail. Boy, won't he be burned up?"

Rufus looked at us. "I'm satisfied they didn't do it," he said to the other Geronimoes. All the boys nodded.

"Can we trust you to return this stuff without involving us?" said Dreyfus.

We said they could. So Rufus untied us, and Dreyfus gathered up all the loot and put it in a big paper bag. "By the way," he said, "we got to thinking after we left you that night that it was going too far to take William Henry's candy. So we left one bag there by the door when we brought the other three to the table. We were going to leave it on his porch as soon as we'd delivered the other three bags, but after we found the stolen stuff, we forgot about that extra bag until today. You can give it back to William Henry."

Then they made Willie and me solemnly swear that we would not squeal on Ronald Pruitt. They said that they'd take care of him.

"Boy," said Willie when we were on our way home, "I'd hate to be in Ronald's shoes."

I felt the same way. There was no telling what the Geronimoes would do to Ronald. Willie thought maybe they'd bury him in an ant hill, but I thought it was too late in the year for ants.

Anyway, Willie and I returned all the stolen loot. We got Jackie and Freddie and Morris and Hubert together and told them we'd recovered the stolen articles but we couldn't tell how because innocent people were involved. After they'd praised Willie and me, we all organized and some of us rang front door bells and made conversation while others slipped in the back door and returned the stolen article. If the back door was locked, we all paid a visit and offered to help look for the missing article and then hid it somewhere. It was a lot of fun. Freddie hid Jackie's grandfather's paper knife in a dictionary. He hid it in the p's for paper knife.

But the mysterious part came later. It turned out that William Henry had stayed in his house all day because he'd heard there was a thief in town and he was afraid he'd be stolen. But after Jackie and Morris pretended to find the trick-or-treat bag on his porch and delivered it to him, I guess William Henry decided there wasn't really any thief, he's so dumb. Because about fifteen minutes later, when Willie and I were sitting on my steps wondering what was happening to Ronald, out came William Henry with his trick-or-treat bag. He was looking as if it were Christmas.

"Look at my prize," he said. "I took the prize."

"Good night," said Willie. "Do we have to go through all that again? Go somewhere else, William Henry."

"See," said William Henry, holding up a watch. "See my prize. I

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took the prize. Old Ronald Pruitt didn't take the prize."

Willie and I looked at it with our mouths open. *It was the watch Ronald had won at Mr. Bolger's party!*

"Where did you get that?" I said.

"In my trick-or-treat bag," said William Henry. "I took the prize, didn't I?"

Willie and I looked at each other with our mouths still open. We both deducted the same thing at the same time. If William Henry had Ronald's watch, then it was Ronald's trick-or-treat bag that was on the floor of the clubhouse when the bag of stolen articles was on the table.

"Ronald isn't the one?" said Willie.

"How could he be?" I said.

"Do you think we'd better tell them," said Willie, "before they skin Ronald or whatever they're going to do to him?"

We hated to, partly because Ronald has a skinning coming to him and partly because the Geronimoes might start suspecting us again, but it was the only ethical thing to do. So we rode back to the clubhouse. But nobody was there.

We found out later that the Geronimoes had gone looking for Ronald, had found him teasing Mr. Bolger's dog, and had surrounded him. Ronald was scared at first, but when they accused him of being a robber, Ronald stood up to them. Ronald may be a creep, but he's got plenty of spunk. He said he wasn't a thief, but somebody was, because somebody had stolen his trick-or-treat bag and his watch, too. He was so mad about it that he shook the confidence of the Geronimoes, and they decided not to rush into action until they were sure about Ronald. So they gave him a good paddling just for teasing dogs.

Anyway, when Willie and I finally found Rufus and Dreyfus, we told them why Ronald couldn't have been the thief. Rufus and Dreyfus got very interested in the fact that Ronald had won a pocket watch at Mr. Bolger's, and we explained all about it and how Ronald wouldn't have won if we'd got there on time. We were telling what a disgusting Halloween we'd had and what a pain in the neck William Henry had been when all of a sudden Rufus and Dreyfus began to laugh and yell and hit each other on the back. Then they jumped on their bikes, waved at Willie and me, and rode away yelling their Geronimo war whoop. Rufus and Dreyfus aren't like anybody else. They sure are great.

Well, that's about all. By the time we told William Henry that he had Ronald Pruitt's watch and should give it back, William Henry had broken it and didn't care about it any more, anyway. So he left it on Ronald's doorstep. The crystal was cracked and one of the hands was gone and the face was scratched

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and some springs were coming out at the back. We heard that Ronald was real burned up, but he shouldn't have won that prize in the first place.

To this day Willie and I are stumped when we think about this case. We made good deductions about Greatheart and about Ronald not being the thief, but nobody knows yet who the thief was. The Geronimoes must have been mixed up about the bags. Because if they're right, it just doesn't make sense. Ronald wasn't the thief. And it certainly wasn't Willie and me. So who else could it have been? Willie says that if the Geronimoes are right, the thief must have been a ghost.

## CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

| AUTHOR | TITLE | PUBLISHER | PRICE | ON SALE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Butler, Gwendoline | COFFIN FOR BABY | Walker & Co. | $3.50 | 10/28/63 |
| Eberhart, Mignon | RUN SCARED | Random House, Inc. | 3.95 | 10/1/63 |
| Gaines, Robert | THE INVISIBLE EVIL | Walker & Co. | 3.50 | 10/28/63 |
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| Webb, Jack | MAKE MY BED SOON | Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. | 3.50 | 10/10/63 |

## CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

| AUTHOR | TITLE | PUBLISHER | PRICE | ON SALE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christie, Agatha | DEATH IN THE AIR | Popular Library | $0.40 | 10/17/63 |
| Ford, Leslie | FALSE TO ANY MAN | Popular Library | .40 | 10/17/63 |
| Marlowe, Dan J. | STRONGARM | Gold Medal | .40 | 9/26/63 |
| McPartland, John | THE KINGDOM OF JOHNNY COOL | Gold Medal | .40 | 9/26/63 |
| Stone, Hampton | THE BABE WITH THE TWISTABLE ARM | Popular Library | .40 | 10/3/63 |

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*Many fine riddle stories have been written in the past twenty years, and quite a few of them have appeared in EQMM—for example, Hal Ellson's "The Last Answer" (EQMM, October 1962), which Anthony Boucher included in his first anthology (stories of 1962) in the* BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR *series. But excellent as some contemporary riddle stories are, we think most critics would agree that, in a classical-historical sense, there are three peerless fictional riddles.*

*In chronological order, the earliest was Mark Twain's "Awful, Terrible Medieval Romance," which first appeared in 1871 and was published by EQMM in our issue of November 1945. Second came that famous dazzler, Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" which had its first book publication in 1884 and appeared in the March 1953 issue of EQMM. Third, without question or doubt, is Cleveland Moffett's "The Mysterious Card," which made its debut in print in the Boston magazine called "The Black Cat," February 1896, and was published in book form the same year or possibly the next (even the Library of Congress is not sure of the exact date).*

*Now, we have brought you the two remarkable riddles by Mark Twain and Frank R. Stockton, so why shouldn't we give you a chance to read (or reread) the third of the great triumvirate? Here, then, is an unfading, undying, a truly timeless riddle story that you will find just as fascinating and irresistible as it was nearly 70 years ago—just as baffling—and just as infuriating!*

# THE MYSTERIOUS CARD

*by CLEVELAND MOFFETT*

RICHARD BURWELL OF NEW YORK will never cease to regret that the French language was not made a part of his education.

This is why: On the second evening after Burwell arrived in Paris, feeling lonely without his wife and daughter, who were still visiting a friend in London, his mind naturally turned to the theater. So, after consulting the daily amusement calendar, he decided to visit the *Folies Bergère*, which he had heard of as one of the notable sights.

During an intermission he went into the beautiful garden, where gay crowds were strolling among the flowers, and lights, and fountains. He had just seated himself at a little three-legged table, with a view



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to enjoying the novel scene, when his attention was attracted by a lovely woman, gowned strikingly, though in perfect taste, who passed near him, leaning on the arm of a gentleman. The only thing that he noticed about this gentleman was that he wore eyeglasses.

Now Burwell had never posed as a captivator of the fair sex, and could scarcely credit his eyes when the lady left the side of her escort and, turning back as if she had forgotten something, passed close by him, and deftly placed a card on his table. The card bore some French words written in purple ink, but, not knowing that language, he was unable to make out their meaning.

The lady paid no further heed to him, but, rejoining the gentleman with the eyeglasses, swept out of the place with the grace and dignity of a princess. Burwell remained staring at the card.

Needless to say, he thought no more of the performance or of the other attractions about him. Everything seemed flat and tawdry compared with the radiant vision that had appeared and disappeared so mysteriously. His one desire now was to discover the meaning of the words written on the card.

Calling a fiacre, he drove to the Hotel Continental, where he was staying. Proceeding directly to the office and taking the manager aside, Burwell asked if he would be kind enough to translate a few words of French into English. There were no more than twenty words in all.

"Why, certainly," said the manager with French politeness, and cast his eyes over the card. As he read, his face grew rigid with astonishment, and, looking at his questioner sharply, he exclaimed, "Where did you get this, monsieur?"

Burwell started to explain, but was interrupted by: "That will do, that will do. You must leave the hotel."

"What do you mean?" asked the man from New York, in amazement.

"You must leave the hotel now—tonight—without fail," commanded the manager excitedly.

Now it was Burwell's turn to grow angry, and he declared heatedly that if he wasn't wanted in this hotel there were plenty of others in Paris where he would be welcome. And with an assumption of dignity, but piqued at heart, he settled his bill, sent for his belongings, and drove up the Rue de la Paix to the Hôtel Bellevue, where he spent the night.

On the next morning he met the proprietor, who seemed a good fellow, and being inclined now to view the incident of the previous evening from its ridiculous side, Burwell explained what had befallen him, and was pleased to find a sympathetic listener.

"Why, the man was a fool," declared the proprietor. "Let me see the card—I will tell you what it means." But as he read, his face and manner changed instantly.

"This is a serious matter," he said

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sternly. "Now I understand why my *confrère* refused to entertain you. I regret, monsieur, but I shall be obliged to do as he did."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that you cannot remain here."

With that he turned on his heel, and the indignant guest could not prevail on him to give any explanation.

"We'll see about this," said Burwell, thoroughly angered.

It was now nearly noon, and the New Yorker remembered an engagement for lunch with a friend from Boston, who, with his family, was stopping at the Hôtel de l'Alma. With his luggage on the carriage, he ordered the *cocher* to drive directly there, determined to take counsel with his countryman before selecting new quarters.

Burwell's friend was highly indignant when he heard the story—a fact that gave Burwell no little comfort, knowing, as he did, that the man was accustomed to foreign ways from long residence abroad.

"It is some silly mistake, my dear fellow. I wouldn't pay any attention to it. Just have your luggage taken down and stay here. It is a nice, homelike place, and it will be very jolly, all being together. But, first, let me prepare a little 'nerve settler' for you."

After the two had lingered a moment over their Manhattan cocktails, Burwell's friend excused himself to call the ladies. He had proceeded only two or three steps when he turned, and said, "Let's see that mysterious card that has raised all this row."

He had scarcely withdrawn it from Burwell's hand when he started back, and exclaimed, "Great God, man! Do you mean to say—this is simply—"

Then, with a sudden movement of his hand to his head, he left the room.

He was gone perhaps five minutes, and when he returned his face was white.

"I am awfully sorry," he said nervously, "but the ladies tell me they—that is, my wife—she has a frightful headache. You will have to excuse us from the lunch."

Instantly realizing that this was only a flimsy pretense, and deeply hurt by his friend's behavior, the mystified man arose at once and left without another word. He was now determined to solve this mystery at any cost. What could be the meaning of the words on that infernal piece of pasteboard?

Profiting by his humiliating experiences, he took good care not to show the card to anyone at the hotel where he now established himself—a comfortable little place near the Grand Opera House.

All through the afternoon he thought of nothing but the card, and turned over in his mind various ways of learning its meaning without getting himself into further trouble. That evening he went again to the

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*Folies Bergère* in the hope of finding the mysterious woman, for he was now more than ever anxious to discover who she was.

It even occurred to him that she might be one of those beautiful Nihilist conspirators, or, perhaps, a Russian spy, such as he had read of in novels. But he failed to find her, either then or on the three subsequent evenings which he passed in the same place.

Meanwhile the card was burning in his pocket like a hot coal. He dreaded the thought of meeting anyone he knew while this horrible cloud hung over him. He bought a French-English dictionary and tried to pick out the meaning word by word, but failed. It was all Greek to him. For the first time in his life, Burwell regretted that he had not studied French at college.

After various vain attempts either to solve or forget the torturing riddle, he saw no other course than to lay the problem before a detective agency. Accordingly he put his case in the hands of an *agent de sûreté* who was recommended as a competent and trustworthy man.

They had a talk together in a private room, and, of course, Burwell showed the card. To his relief, his adviser showed no sign of taking offense. Only he did not and would not explain what the words meant.

"It is better," he said, "that monsieur should not know the nature of this document for the present. I will do myself the honor to call on monsieur tomorrow at his hotel, and then monsieur shall know everything."

"Then it is really serious?" asked the unfortunate man.

"Very serious," was the answer.

The next twenty-four hours Burwell passed in a fever of anxiety. As his mind conjured up one fearful possibility after another, he deeply regretted that he had not torn up the miserable card at the start. He even seized it—prepared to strip it into fragments, and so end the whole affair. And then his Yankee stubbornness asserted itself, and he determined to see the thing out, come what might.

"After all," he reasoned, "it is no crime for a man to pick up a card that a lady drops on his table."

Crime or no crime, however, it looked very much as if he had committed some grave offense when, the next day, his detective drove up in a carriage, accompanied by a uniformed official, and requested the astounded American to accompany them to the police headquarters.

"What for?" he asked.

"It is only a formality," said the detective; and when Burwell still protested the man in uniform remarked, "You'd better come quietly, monsieur—you will have to come, anyway."

An hour later, after severe cross-examination by another official, who demanded many facts about the New Yorker's age, place of birth, residence, and occupation, and the

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bewildered man found himself in the Conciergerie prison. Why he was there or what was about to befall him, Burwell had no means of knowing; but before the day was over he succeeded in having a message sent to the American Legation, where he demanded immediate protection as a citizen of the United States.

It was not until evening, however, that the Secretary of the Legation, a consequential person, called at the prison. There followed a stormy interview, in which the prisoner used some strong language, the French officers gesticulated violently and talked very fast, and the Secretary calmly listened to both sides, said little, and smoked a good cigar.

"I will lay your case before the American minister," he said as he rose to go, "and let you know the result tomorrow."

"But this is an outrage! Do you mean to say—" Before he could finish, however, the Secretary, with a strangely suspicious glance, turned and left the room.

That night Burwell slept in a cell.

The next morning he received another visit from the noncommittal Secretary, who informed him that matters had been arranged, and that he was now free.

"I must tell you, though," he said, "that I have had great difficulty in accomplishing this, and your liberty is granted only on condition that you leave the country within twenty-four hours, and that you never under any conditions return."

Burwell stormed, raged, and pleaded; but it availed nothing. The Secretary was inexorable, and yet he positively refused to throw any light on the causes of this monstrous injustice.

"Here is your card," he said, handing him a large envelope closed with the seal of Legation. "I advise you to burn it and never refer to the matter again."

That night the ill-fated man took the train for London, his heart consumed by hatred for the whole French nation, together with a burning desire for vengeance. He wired his wife to meet him at the station, and for a long time debated with himself whether he should tell her the sickening truth. In the end he decided that it was better to keep silent.

No sooner, however, had she seen him than her woman's instinct told her he was laboring under some mental strain. And he saw in a moment that to withhold from her his burning secret was impossible, especially when she began to talk of the trip they had planned through France. Of course no trivial reason would satisfy her for his refusal to make this trip, since they had been looking forward to it for years; and yet it was impossible now for him to set foot on French soil.

So he finally told her the whole story, she laughing and weeping in

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turn. To her, as to him, it seemed incredible that such overwhelming disasters could have grown out of so small a cause, and, being a fluent French scholar, she demanded a sight of the fatal piece of pasteboard. In vain her husband tried to divert her by proposing a trip through Italy. She would consent to nothing until she had seen the mysterious card which Burwell was now convinced he ought long ago to have destroyed.

After refusing for a while to let her see it, he finally yielded. But, although he had learned to dread the consequences of showing that cursed card, he was little prepared for what followed. She read it, turned pale, gasped for breath, and nearly fell to the floor.

"I told you not to read it," he said; and then, growing tender at the sight of her distress, he took her hand in his and begged her to be calm. "At least tell me what the thing means," he said. "We can bear it together; you surely can trust me."

But she, as if stung by rage, pushed him from her and declared, in a tone such as he had never heard from her before, that never, never again would she live with him. "You are a monster!" she exclaimed. And those were the last words he heard from her lips.

Failing utterly in all efforts at reconciliation, the half-crazed man took the first steamer for New York, having suffered in scarcely a fortnight more than in all his previous life. His whole pleasure trip had been ruined; he had failed to consummate important business arrangements; and now he saw his home broken up and his happiness ruined.

During the voyage he scarcely left his stateroom, but lay there prostrated with agony. In this black despondency the one thing that sustained him was the thought of meeting his partner, Jack Evelyth, the friend of his boyhood, the sharer of his success, the bravest and most loyal fellow in the world. In the face of even the most damning circumstances, he felt that Evelyth's rugged common sense would evolve some way of escape from this hideous nightmare.

On landing at New York he hardly waited for the gangplank to be lowered before he rushed on shore and grasped the hand of his partner, who was waiting on the wharf.

"Jack," was his first word, "I am in dreadful trouble, and you are the only man in the world who can help me."

An hour later Burwell sat at his friend's dinner table, talking over the situation.

Evelyth was all kindness, and several times as he listened to Burwell's story his eyes filled with tears.

"It does not seem possible, Richard," he said, "that such things can be; but I will stand by you. We will fight it out together. But we cannot strike in the dark. Let me see this card."

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"There is the damned thing," Burwell said, throwing it on the table.

Evelyth opened the envelope, took out the card, and fixed his eyes on the sprawling purple characters.

"Can you read it?" Burwell asked excitedly.

"Perfectly," his partner said.

The next moment he turned pale, and his voice broke. Then he clasped the tortured man's hand in his with a strong grip. "Richard," he said slowly, "if my only child had been brought here dead it would not have caused me more sorrow than this does. You have brought me the worst news one man could bring another."

His agitation and genuine suffering affected Burwell like a death sentence.

"Speak, man," he cried. "Do not spare me. I can bear anything rather than this awful uncertainty. Tell me what the card means."

Evelyth took a swallow of brandy and sat with head bent on his clasped hands.

"No, I can't do it. There are some things a man must not do."

Then he was silent again, his brows knitted. Finally he said solemnly, "No, I can't see any other way out of it. We have been true to each other all our lives; we have worked together and looked forward to never separating. I would rather fail and die than see this happen. But we have to separate, old friend; we have to separate."

They sat there talking until late into the night. But nothing Burwell could do or say availed against his friend's decision. There was nothing for it but that Evelyth should buy his partner's share of the business or that Burwell buy out the other. The man was more than fair in the financial proposition he made; he was generous, as he always had been, but his determination was inflexible; the two must separate. And they did.

With his old partner's desertion, it seemed to Burwell that the world was leagued against him. It was only three weeks from the day on which he had received the mysterious card; yet in that time he had lost all that he valued most in the world—wife, friends, and business. What next to do with the fatal card was the sickening problem that now possessed him.

He dared not show it; yet he dared not destroy it. He loathed it; yet he could not let it go from his possession. On returning to his house he locked the accursed thing away in his safe as if it had been a package of dynamite or a bottle of deadly poison. Yet not a day passed that he did not open the drawer where the thing was kept and scan with loathing the mysterious purple scrawl.

In desperation he finally made up his mind to take up the study of the language in which the hateful thing was written. And still he dreaded the approach of the day when he

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should decipher its awful meaning.

One afternoon, less than a week after his arrival in New York, he saw a carriage rolling up Broadway. In the carriage was a face that caught his attention like a flash. As he looked again, he recognized the woman who had been the cause of his undoing.

Instantly he sprang into another cab and ordered the driver to follow. He found the house where she was living. He called there several times but always received the same reply —she was too busy to see anyone.

Next he was told that she was ill, and on the following day the servant said she was much worse. Three physicians had been summoned in consultation.

He sought out one of these and told him it was a matter of life or death that he see this woman. The doctor was a kindly man and promised to assist him. Through his influence, it came about that on that very night Burwell stood by the bedside of this mysterious woman. She was beautiful still, though her face was worn with illness.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked trembling, as he leaned over the bed, clutching in one hand an envelope containing the mysterious card. "Do you remember seeing me at the *Folies Bergère* a month ago?"

"Yes," she murmured, after a moment's study of his face; and he noted with relief that she spoke English.

"Then, for God's sake, tell me what does it all mean?" he gasped, quivering with excitement.

"I gave you the card because I wanted you to—to—"

Here a terrible spasm of coughing shook her whole body, and she fell back exhausted.

An agonizing despair tugged at Burwell's heart. Frantically snatching the card from its envelope, he held it close to the woman's face.

"Tell me! Tell me!"

With a supreme effort the pale figure slowly raised itself on the pillow, its fingers clutching at the counterpane.

Then the sunken eyes fluttered—forced themselves open—and stared in stony amazement on the fatal card, while the trembling lips moved noiselessly, as if in an attempt to speak.

As Burwell, choking with eagerness, bent his head slowly to hers, a suggestion of a smile flickered across the woman's face. Again the mouth quivered, the man's head bent nearer and nearer to hers, his eyes riveted upon the lips. Then, as if to aid her in deciphering the mystery, he turned his eyes to the card.

With a cry of horror he sprang to his feet, his eyeballs starting from their sockets. Almost at the same moment the woman fell heavily on the pillow.

Every vestige of the writing had faded! The card was blank!

The woman lay there dead.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DAMON RUNYON**

TITLE: ***Blonde Mink***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: About 20 years ago

COMMENTS: *When "Collier's" first published this story about Slats Slavin (a guy) and Miss Beatrice Gee (a doll), they called it "a new gem by The Master of Main Stem Vernacular" . . . And 'tis that indeed!*

NOW OF COURSE THERE ARE many different ways of cooking tripe but personally I prefer it stewed with tomatoes and mushrooms and a bit of garlic and in fact I am partaking of a portion in this form in Mindy's restaurant on Broadway one evening in January when a personality by the name of Julie the Starker sits down at my table and leans over and sniffs my dish and says to me like this:

"Tripe," he says. "With garlic," he says. "Why, this is according to the recipe of the late Slats Slavin who obtains it from his old Aunt Margaret in Troy. Waiter," he says, "bring me an order of this delicious concoction only with more garlic. It is getting colder outside and a guy needs garlic in his system to thicken his blood. Well," he says, "this is indeed a coincidence because I just come from visiting the late Slats and having a small chat with him."

Naturally I am somewhat surprised by this statement as I know the late Slats is resting in Woodlawn Cemetery and to tell the truth I remember I am present as a pallbearer when he is placed there to rest but I am also pleased to hear these tidings as Slats is always a good friend of mine and no nicer guy ever steps in shoeleather.

"Well," I say to Julie, "and how is Slats these days?"

"He is cold," Julie says. "He states that it is very crimpy around the edges up there in Woodlawn es-

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pecially at night. You know the late Slats always hates cold weather. He is usually in Florida by this time of year to duck the chill.

"Furthermore," Julie says, "he is greatly embarrassed up there without a stone over him such as Beatrice promises to get him. He says it makes him feel like a bum with nothing to show who he is when all around him are many fine markers including one of black marble to the memory of the late Cockeyed Corrigan who is as you know of no consequence compared to the late Slats who is really somebody."

Well, of course this is very true because the late Slats is formerly known and esteemed by one and all on Broadway as one of the smartest operators in horse racing that ever draws breath. He is a handicapper by trade and his figures on the horses that are apt to win are so highly prized that one night he is stuck up by a couple of guys when he has six thou in cash money on him but all they want is his figures on the next day's races.

He is a player and a layer. He will bet on the horses himself when he sees spots he fancies or he will let you bet him on them and he has clients all over the United States who call him up at his office on Broadway and transact business with him one way or the other. He is a tall guy in his late forties who is not much thicker than a lath which is why he is called Slats though his first name is really Terence.

He is by no means Mr. America for looks but he dresses well and he is very rapid with a dollar. He is the softest touch in town for busted guys and he will get up in the middle of the night to do somebody a favor, consequently no one gets more or larger hellos along the main drag than the late Slats.

He comes from a little burg upstate by the name of Cohoes and I hear that he and Julie the Starker are friends from their short-pants days there although Julie is about the last one in the world you will expect to see a guy of class like Slats associating with as Julie is strictly in the muggola department.

He is about Slats' age and is short and thick and has a kisser that is surely a pain to even his own mamma. He is called Julie the Starker because starker means a strong rough guy and there is no doubt that Julie answers this description in every manner, shape and form.

He is at one time in his life a prize-fighter but strictly a catcher which is a way of saying he catches everything the other guy throws at him and at other times he is a bouncer; I do not know what else except that he has some Sing Sing background.

At all times he is a most undesirable personality but he is very fond of the late Slats Slavin and vice versa, and they get along together in a way that is most astonishing to behold. He is not only a handy guy for Slats but he is also a social companion and for some years wherever you

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see Slats you are apt to see Julie the Starker except when Slats is with his fiancée Miss Beatrice Gee and even then you may see Julie though as a rule Miss Beatrice Gee does not approve of him any more than she does of leprosy. In fact, she makes no bones about considering the very sight of Julie revolting to her.

In addition to being the late Slats' fiancée, Miss Beatrice Gee is at this time a prominent show girl in one of Mike Todd's musical shows and she is conceded by one and all to be the most beautiful object on Manhattan Island or anyway no worse than a photo finish for the most beautiful.

She is an original brunette and is quite tall and carries herself in a way that the late Slats says is dignity, though it really comes of Mike Todd's director putting a big copy of the Bible on her head and saying she will either learn to walk balancing it or else, though he never does tell her or else what.

Other dolls call Miss Beatrice Gee a clothes horse because it seems she wears clothes with great skill and furthermore she is crazy about them although her best hold is not wearing them, which she also does with great skill but of course only on the stage. When she is not on the stage she is always groomed like a stake horse going to the post for a big race, and no one takes greater pride in her appearance than the late Slats Slavin, except Miss Beatrice Gee herself.

While I do not believe the story that once when she has a headache and Doc Kelton puts his thermometer in her mouth, to see if she is running a temperature, the mercury freezes tight, there is no doubt that Beatrice is not the emotional type and to be very frank about the matter many think she is downright frosty. But of course no one ever mentions this to the late Slats because he is greatly in love and the chances are he maybe thinks Beatrice is hotter than a stove and personally I am in no position to deny it.

Well, in much less time than it takes me to tell you all this, Julie the Starker has his tripe and is eating it with more sound than is altogether necessary for tripe no matter how it is cooked and to tell the truth I have to wait until he pauses before I can make him hear my voice above his eating. Then I say to him like this:

"Why, Julie," I say, "I cannot understand why Slats is in the plight you describe with reference to the stone. I am under the impression that he leaves Beatrice well loaded as far as the do-re-mi is concerned and I take it for granted that she handles the stone situation. By the way, Julie," I say, "does Slats say anything to you about any horses anywhere for tomorrow?"

"No," Julie says. "But if you have a minute to spare I will tell you the story of Beatrice and her failure to take care of the matter of the stone for the late Slats. It is really a great scandal."

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Then without waiting to hear if I have a minute to spare or not, he starts telling me, and it seems it all goes back to a night in late September when Beatrice informs Slats that she just comes upon a great bargain in a blonde mink coat for $23,000 and that she desires same at once to keep herself warm during the impending winter although she already had enough fur coats in her closet to keep not only herself warm but half of Syracuse, too.

"Pardon me, Julie," I say at this point, "but what is a blonde mink?"

"Why," Julie says, "that is the very question Slats asks and he learns from Beatrice that it is a new light-colored mink fur that is sometimes called blue mink and sometimes platinum mink and sometimes blonde mink and he also learns that no matter what it is called, it is very, very expensive, and after Slats gets all this info he speaks to Beatrice as follows:

"'Baby,' he says, 'you cut right to the crimp when you mention twenty-three thou because that is exactly the size of the bankroll at this moment. But I just come off a tough season and I will need all my ready for navigating purposes the next few months and besides it looks like a mild winter and you can wear your old last season's leopard or Persian lamb or beaver until I get going again.'"

Now at this (Julie the Starker says) Beatrice flies into a terrible rage and tells Slats that he is a tightwad and a skinflint and a miser, and that he has no heart and no pride or he will not suggest that she go around in such shabby old floogers and that she will never humiliate herself in this manner. She says if she waits even a few minutes, someone else is sure to snap up the blonde mink and that she may never again meet with a similar opportunity.

"Well, they have a large quarrel," Julie says, "and when Slats and I get back to his hotel apartment that night he complains of not feeling any too well and in fact he finally keels over on the bed with his tongue hanging out and I send for Doc Kelton who says it is a heart attack and very bad.

"He says to tell the truth it is 100 to 1. Slats will not beat it, and then Doc takes his departure stating that he has so many shorter-priced patients he cannot afford to waste time on long shots and he leaves it to me to notify Slats that his number is up.

"On receiving this information, Slats requests me to find Miss Beatrice Gee and bring her to his bedside, which I do, although at first she is much opposed to leaving her table in the Stork Club where she is the center of a gay throng until I whisper to her that I will be compelled to flatten her and carry her unless she does.

"But on arriving at Slats' apartment and realizing that he is indeed an invalid, Beatrice seems to be quite downcast and starts to shed tears all over the joint, and I have

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no doubt that some of them are on the level because surely she must remember how kind Slats is to her.

"Then Slats says he wishes to talk to Beatrice alone and requests me to go into the next room, but of course I leave a crack in the door so I can hear what goes on between them and what I hear is Slats saying to Beatrice like this:

" 'Baby,' he says, 'reach in under my pillow and get the package of currency there. It is the twenty-three I tell you about and it is all the dough I have in the world. It is all yours except twenty-six hundred which you are to pay Clancy Brothers the tombstone makers in Yonkers for a stone I pick out for myself some time ago and forget to pay for although my plot in Woodlawn is free and clear.

" 'It is a long stone of white Carrara marble in excellent taste,' Slats says. 'It is to lie flat over my last resting place, not to stand upright, and it is cut to exactly cover same from end to end and side to side. I order it in this form,' Slats says, 'because I am always a restless soul and long have a fear I may not lie quietly in my last resting place but may wish to roam around unless there is a sort of lid over me such as this stone. And besides,' he says, 'it will keep the snow off me. I loathe and despise the snow. I will leave the engraving to you, Baby, but promise you will take care of the stone at once.'

"Well, I hear Beatrice promise between sobs, and also no doubt as she is reaching under the pillow for Slats' plant, and when I step back into the room a little later, Slats is a goner and Beatrice is now really letting the salt water flow freely, although her best effort is in Woodlawn two days later when it looks as if we will have to send for a siphon to unflood the premises.

"But to show you what a smart strudel Beatrice is, she is around the day after we place the late Slats to rest saying that he does not leave her a thin dime. You see, she is figuring against the chance that relatives of Slats may show up and claim his estate and she even lets Slats' lodge pay the funeral expenses although of course this is no more than is coming to any departed brother.

"I do not dispute her statement because I think she is entitled to the dough as long as Slats gives it to her and of course I take it for granted that she will split herself out from enough of the swag to buy the stone according to her promise and in fact I am so sure of this that one afternoon last week I go out to Woodlawn not only to pay my respects to the memory of the late Slats but to see how his last resting place looks with the stone over it.

"Well, what do I see but Slats himself walking around and around a mound of dried earth with some withered flowers scattered over it and among these flowers I recognize

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my own wreath which says *So long, pal* on it and which costs me a double-saw, but there is no stone whatsoever over the mound, not even as much as a weentsy little pebble."

"Just a minute, Julie," I say. "You state that you see the late Slats walking around and about. Do you see him all pale and vapory?"

"Well," Julie says, "now you mention it, I do seem to recall that Slats is a little on the pale side of what he used to be. But he is otherwise unchanged except that he is not wearing his derby hat as usual. We do not give him his derby hat when we place him to rest, as the undertaker guy says it is not necessary. Anyway, when he spies me, Slats stops walking and sits down on the edge of the late Cockeyed Corrigan's black marble marker, which is practically next door to him and says to me like this:

" 'Hello, Julie,' he says. 'I am commencing to wonder what becomes of you. I am walking around here for weeks trying to keep warm and I am all tuckered out. What do you suppose is the idea of not providing people with overcoats when they are placed to rest? Only I do not rest, Julie. Do you see Beatrice lately and what does she say about my stone?'

" 'Slats,' I say, 'I must confess I do not see Beatrice lately, but I never dream she does not provide the stone long before this as per her promise which I can tell you now I overhear her make to you. A solemn deathbed promise.'

" 'Never mind what kind of bed it is,' Slats says. 'It is a morbid topic. And I think you have plenty of gall to be on the Erie when I am saying my last goodbye to my baby. You owe us both an apology. Look her up right away and ask her what about my stone. The chances are there is a hitch somewhere. Maybe the engraving is causing the delay. I am sure Beatrice will wish something sentimental on it like *Sleep well, my beloved*, and engraving takes time.'

"Well, I am about to mention that she already takes time enough to have George Washington's farewell address engraved on it but all of a sudden the late Slats disappears from sight and I take this as a hint for me to blow, too, and that very night I hunt up Beatrice to give her Slats' message.

"I find her standing at the bar of a gaff called the Palmetto with a couple of guys and I notice she is wearing a fur coat the color of mist that I do not remember ever seeing on her before and I turn to a dame who is sitting at a table and say to her like this:

" 'Pardon me, little miss,' I say, 'but just to satisfy my curiosity, can you tell me the name of the fur that party over yonder is wearing?'

" 'Blonde mink,' she says. 'It is perfectly beautiful, too.'

" 'And what does such a garment cost?' I ask.

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" 'Why,' she says, 'that one seems to be first-class merchandise. It costs maybe twenty-five thousand dollars. Maybe more, but not much less. It is the very newest fur out.'

"Then I walk over to Beatrice and tap her on the shoulder, and when she turns I motion her out of hearing distance of the guys she is with and speak to her as follows:

" 'Well, Bea,' I say, 'your new coat must hang a little heavy on you considering that it represents the weight of a nice tombstone. I never mention it to you before but I hear your last chat with the late Slats Slavin including your promise but until I find you in this lovely benny no one will ever make me believe you mean to welch on your word.'

" 'All right, all right,' she says. 'So I do not buy the stone. But it costs twenty-six hundred and all I have is twenty-three thousand and an odd tenner and this coat is a steal at twenty-three. If I wait another minute longer someone else is sure to snap it up and the dealer wants his all cash. Besides Slats will never know he does not get the stone.'

" 'Bea,' I says, 'I have a talk with Slats today at Woodlawn. He knows he has no stone and he is upset about it. But he is making excuses for you, Bea. He figures you are unexpectedly delayed a bit in getting it there. You have the guy fooled even yet.'

"At this Beatrice gazes at me for some time without saying a word and I notice that looking into her eyes is just the same as looking into a couple of ice cubes. Then she gives her new coat a hitch and brings it closer around her and finally she says:

" 'Julie,' she says, 'I want to tell you something. If ever again you speak to me or about me I will start remembering out loud that Slats has a large bundle of cash on him that last night and I will also start wondering out loud what becomes of it and a guy with your biography cannot stand much wonderment such as that. And if you see Slats again tell him how I look in my new coat.'

" 'Bea,' I say, 'you will never have any luck with your new coat because it means leaving poor Slats up there in Woodlawn restless and cold.'

" 'No luck?' she says. 'Listen,' she says, 'do you see the dopey-looking little punk in the uniform leaning against the bar? His name is Freddy Voogan and his papa is a squillionaire out in Denver and I am going to marry the kid any minute and what do you think gets him for me? My blonde mink. He notices how nice I look in it and insists on meeting me. No luck?' Beatrice says. 'Is kicking up a gold mine no luck?'

" 'Bea,' I say, 'it is bad enough to rob the grave as you already do but it is even worse to rob the cradle.'

" 'Goodbye, Julie,' Bea says. 'Do not forget to tell Slats how I look in my new coat.'

"Well, I will say she looks wonderful in it even though I am greatly

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disappointed in her because it is plain to be seen that Beatrice has no sentiment about the past. So now I am compelled to report back to the late Slats Slavin that he is on a bust as far as the stone is concerned and I hope and trust that my revelation will not cause him too much anguish."

And with this, Julie the Starker dunks up the last of the tripe gravy on his plate with a piece of rye bread and gets up to take his departure and I say to him like this:

"Julie," I say, "if you happen to think of it, kindly ask the late Slats to look over the entries at Hialeah for the next few days and if he can send me a winner now and then I can get certain parties to bet a little for me."

"Well," Julie says, "Slats has other things on his mind besides horses right now, but," he says, "I will try to remember your request although of course you will carry me for a small piece of your end."

Then he leaves me and I am still sitting there when a plainclothes copper by the name of Johnny Brannigan comes in and sits down in the chair Julie just vacates and orders some Danish pastry and a cup of java, and then almost as if he hears the conversation between Julie and me he says:

"Oh, hello," he says. "How well do you know Miss Beatrice Gee who is formerly the fiancée of the late Slats Slavin? I mean how well do you know her history and most especially do you know any knocks against her?"

"Why?" I say.

"Well," Johnny says, "it is strictly an unofficial question. There is hell up Ninth Street over her. A family out in Denver that must have more weight than Pike's Peak gets the Denver police department to ask our department very quietly about her, and our department requests me to make a few inquiries—not an official police matter, you understand, just an exchange of courtesies.

"It seems," Johnny says, "that Miss Beatrice Gee is going to marry a member of this family who is under twenty-one years of age and his papa and mamma are doing handstands about it, though personally," Johnny says, "I believe in letting love take its course. But," he says, "my theory has nothing to do with the fact that I promise to make a return of some kind on this blintz."

"Well, Johnny," I say, "I do not know anything whatever about her but you just miss a guy who can probably give you a complete rundown on her. You just miss Julie the Starker. However," I say, "I am pretty sure to run into him tomorrow and will tell him to contact you."

But I do not see Julie the next day or for several days after that and I am greatly disappointed as I not only wish to tell him to get in touch with Johnny but I am anxious to

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learn if Slats sends me any info on the horses. For that matter I do not see Johnny Brannigan either until late one afternoon I run into him on Broadway and he says to me like this:

"Say," he says, "you are just the guy I am looking for. Do you see the late editions of the blats?"

"No," I say, "why?"

"Well," Johnny says, "they are carrying big stories about the finding of Miss Beatrice Gee in her apartment in East 57th Street as dead as a doornail. It looks as if the young guy from Denver she is going to marry bounces a big bronze lamp off her coco in what the scribes will undoubtedly call a fit of jealousy because he has a big row with her early in the evening in the Canary Club when he finds a Marine captain from the Pacific teaching her how the island natives in those parts rub noses when they greet each other, although the young guy claims he walks away from her then and does not see her again because he is too busy loading himself up with champagne.

"But," Johnny says, "he is found unconscious from the champagne in his hotel room today and admits he does not remember when or where or what or why. My goodness," Johnny says, "the champagne they sell nowadays is worse than an anesthetic."

Naturally this news about Miss Beatrice Gee is quite distressing to me if only because of her former association with the late Slats Slavin and I am sorry to hear of the young guy's plight, too, even though I do not know him. I am always sorry to hear of young guys in trouble and especially rich young guys but of course if they wish to mix bronze lamps with champagne they must take the consequences and I so state to Johnny Brannigan.

"Well," Johnny says, "he does not seem to be the bronze-lamp type, and yet who else has a motive to commit this deed? You must always consider the question of motive in crimes of this nature."

"What about robbery?" I say.

"No," Johnny says. "All her jewelry and other belongings are found in the apartment. The only thing missing as far as her maid and acquaintances can tell seems to be a new fur coat which she probably leaves some place in her wanderings during the evening. But now I remember why I am looking for you. I am still collecting data on Miss Beatrice Gee's background though this time officially and I recall you tell me that maybe Julie the Starker can give me some information and I wish to know where I am apt to find Julie."

"A new fur coat, Johnny?" I say. "Well," I say, "as a rule I am not in favor of aiding and abetting coppers but this matter seems different and if you will take a ride with me I may be able to lead you to Julie."

So I call a taxicab and as we get in, I tell the jockey to drive us to

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Woodlawn Cemetery and if Johnny Brannigan is surprised by our destination he does not crack but whiles away the time on the journey by relating many of his experiences as a copper, some of which are very interesting.

It is coming on dusk when we reach Woodlawn and while I have an idea of the general direction of the late Slats Slavin's last resting place, I have to keep the taxi guy driving around inside the gates for some time before I spot the exact location through recognizing the late Cockeyed Corrigan's black marble marker.

It is a short distance off the auto roadway, so I have the hackie stop and Johnny Brannigan and I get out of the cab to walk a few yards to the mound and as we approach same who steps out from the shadow of the late Cockeyed Corrigan's marker but Julie the Starker who speaks to me as follows:

"Hello, hello," he says. "I am glad to see you and I know you will be pleased to learn that the late Slats gives me a tip for you on a horse that goes at Hialeah tomorrow but the name escapes me at the moment. He says his figures make it an absolute kick in the pants. Well," Julie says, "stick around a while and maybe I will remember it."

Then he seems to notice the presence of Johnny Brannigan for the first time and to recognize him, too, because all of a sudden he outs with Captain Barker and says:

"Oh, a copper, eh?" he says. "Well, here is a little kiss for you."

And with this he lets go a slug that misses Johnny Brannigan and knocks an arm off a pink stone cherub in the background and he is about to encore when Johnny blasts ahead of him, and Julie the Starker drops his pizzolover and his legs begin bending like Leon Errol's when Leon is playing a drunk.

He finally staggers up to the last resting place of the late Slats Slavin and falls there with the blood pumping from the hole that Johnny Brannigan drills in his chest and as I notice his lips moving I hasten to his side figuring that he may be about to utter the name of the horse Slats gives him for me.

Then I observe that there is something soft and fuzzy spread out on the mound under him that Julie the Starker pats weakly with one hand as he whispers to me like this.

"Well," he says, "the late Slats is not only resting in peace now with the same as his stone over him but he is as warm as toast.

"The horse, Julie," I say. "What is the name of the horse?"

But Julie only closes his eyes and as it is plain to be seen that he now joins out permanently with the population of Woodlawn, Johnny Brannigan steps forward and rolls him off the mound with his foot and picks up the object under Julie and examines it in the dim light.

"I always think Julie is a little stir-crazy," Johnny says, "but I wonder

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why he takes a pop at me when all I want is to ask him some questions and I wonder, too, where this nice red fox fur coat comes from?"

Well, of course I know that Johnny will soon realize that Julie probably thinks Johnny wishes to chat with him about the job he does on Miss Beatrice Gee but at the moment I am too provoked about Julie holding out the tip the late Slats Slavin gives him for me to discuss the matter or even to explain that the red is only Julie's blood and that the coat is really blonde mink.

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***Real-Life Solution to***

## WHO KILLED RUBY MAE POTTER?

*by EDWARD D. RADIN*

"We know," Sheriff Cash continued, "that Ruby was very happy after receiving that 6 o'clock call. Which of her suitors would appeal most to an aging woman seeking romance? She knew Case wouldn't marry her and she'd already turned down Rhodes's proposal. But she had not seen Williams for some time and the fact that she still kept his picture on her dresser showed she was still interested in him. That 6 o'clock call probably came from him. Let's check Williams and Nellie again."

Questioned further, the young couple confessed. The ex-soldier admitted telephoning Ruby at 6 P.M. and she'd readily agreed to ditch Rhodes after dinner and meet Williams. She had not known about Nellie and was surprised to find the girl with him.

Williams, at the wheel, drove to their former trysting spot. There he told Ruby he was marrying Nellie and asked for the loan of her car for their honeymoon.

Ruby curtly refused. When Nellie demanded the return of a friendship ring her fiancé had given Ruby, the widow threw it out of the car window.

Nellie knew Williams was carrying a gun and she grabbed it and shot Ruby in the shoulder. Williams then took the gun and fired the fatal shot into the back of the head. They had intended taking the car but left it because of the bloodstains, hiking back to Chattanooga and arranging their alibi story between them.

Jointly indicted, they were convicted of first degree murder. On June 27, 1947, Nellie was sentenced to 40 years, and Williams received 99 years.

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*a new story by*

**GERALD KERSH**

**EDITORS' FILE CARD**

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR: | GERALD KERSH |
| TITLE: | *The Persian Bedspread* |
| TYPE: | Crime Story |
| LOCALE: | United States |
| TIME: | The Present |
| COMMENTS: | *As odd a tale as you've ever read—about the smoothest, slickest rug and tapestry dealer you've ever met in print—a story with a curiously haunting quality . . .* |

IN THE TRADE, SOME SINISTER similes were applied to Mr. Hadad—he evoked images of danger. "A coiled spring wrapped in fat, such as the Eskimos use for catching bears," said one. Another said, "Dealing with Hadad is like feeling for a double-edged razor blade on a slippery floor in the dark."

But in the discreet light of his shop, which was the shyest of all those shops off Fifth Avenue where sensitive tradesmen seem to hide for fear of customers, Mrs. Gourock saw only a plump, creamy-skinned, spaniel-eyed little man, forlorn in posture, smiling wistfully. Mrs. Gourock was a woman who knew what she wanted, and had the wherewithal to buy it.

"I want a rug for my husband's study," she said. "How much is the thing in the window?"

The jeweler in that street exhibited one pearl, the milliner one hat, and Hadad one rug.

"Oh, that?" said Hadad, thinking that some women's egos need inflating, others invite a pinprick. "The silk Bijar? Oh, say twelve thousand dollars."

Taken aback, she said, "It's for my husband's study. Twelve thousand dollars!"

"Ah," said Hadad, "for your husband's study. You have in mind something less costly. First, pray be seated, and let me offer you a cup of coffee.—Oh, Dikran, coffee, please."

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And he said to himself: If a woman like this one buys her husband gifts, she is up to some hanky-panky. She is a payer of payments, not a giver of gifts.

"Perhaps a Bijar is too blazing a blue for the seclusion of a study; it is hard to read on a Bijar," he told her. "On the other hand, there is something gently hypnotic about a Sarafan. I love a Sarafan. But such as I have here would perhaps cost more than you would be prepared to spend, just for a study."

"What's that one up there?" she asked, pointing to the wall behind Hadad. "Is it a rug? Or a tapestry? And why is it framed?"

"So many questions all in one breath!" said Hadad, laughing. "It is framed, dear lady, because I had it framed. And its history is not for ladies to hear—"

"Do you take me for a child?"

Hadad shook his head, and surmised: about 39 years and six months old, you—without counting your teeth.

"In any case, it is a sort of curiosity, ma'am, which you wouldn't care to buy even if it were for sale," he said.

"Why? How d'you know?"

"Ah, coffee," said Hadad. His assistant drew up a low table and set down a tray.

"I can't eat that Turkish delight," said Mrs. Gourock.

Hadad said, "Other *rahat lakoum* you cannot eat. This you will eat. Now let me think what would be nice for your husband's study. He is a quiet, reserved man, I think?"

"How d'you know?"

Because, Hadad decided, wordlessly, it is generally the gentle ones that get grabbed in marriage by great brassy women like you, who would have your cake and eat it too. Also, I think he has a controlled devil of a temper, and the money is all his—or why should you be all of a sudden so considerate of him in his study?

Meanwhile, he murmured, "I have Mosul, Kir Shehr, and sumptuous Teherans. I have Kirman, Shiraz, and silken Tabriz. I have Bergama, Fereghan, Khorosan—"

"I want you to tell me what that is in the frame."

"Well," said Hadad, smiling, "it is *not* something you can get at Mejjid's Auction Rooms in Atlantic City, where—unless my memory deceives me, which it never does—you bought for $300 a pair of Chinese vases worth, alas, about $40." He added, "June 29th, 1950."

Then his voice faded, his lips parted, his eyelids drooped, and Mrs. Gourock was reminded of Peter Lorre in a murder movie: Hadad had just that lost, sick, hopeless look.

He forestalled her inevitable "How d'you know?" by saying, "It happens that I was there at the time, and I never forget a face. You were bidding against an old lady in an immense straw hat. Her name was Kitty. She was a shill."

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"I like auctions," said Mrs. Gourock. "I didn't want the vases. I've paid more—oh, so much more—than $300 for two hours' entertainment . . ." She was surprised to catch herself making excuses. "What's a shill?"

"You know," said Hadad, "that if anyone is running a so-called game of chance at a fair, somebody must appear to win *pour encourager les autres.* Thus, at a pea-and-thimble game, a seemingly silly farmer will win $100 while the audience is gathering. He is a shill, employed by the thimble-rigger, and he is not paid in real money.

"Conversely, at a certain type of auction sale, somebody must get an obvious bargain to excite the onlookers.

"Thus, the attics and thrift shops of the nation are full of Mejjid's stuff, all bought by people who cannot for the life of them say just what made them blurt out that last silly bid before the auctioneer cried 'Gone!' It's no disgrace to you; it is like feeding a slot machine with silver dollars, but warmer, less impersonal—only, once in ten thousand tries, a slot machine will disgorge a jackpot, and Mejjid will never disgorge anything."

Dogged as a spoiled child, Mrs. Gourock persisted. "I want you to tell me about that thing in the frame."

Hadad seemed not to have heard her; he went right on.

"You know how it is, dear lady. You look in—only for fun, mind. No harm in that, eh? The auctioneer is about to give away a cut glass lemonade set, free of charge. He doesn't want to—personally, he'd cherish such a lemonade set, make an heirloom of it. But he's paid (sigh) to give things away. However, first things first; and here's a Moorish coffee table. Everybody nudges everybody else as the auction room fills up; everybody is there to kill time. Nobody's going to buy anything at all. The joke's on Mejjid, eh? Poor old Mejjid!

"And so some joker bids fifty cents for the coffee table, and there is a titter when a grim old lady in inappropriate shorts calls out seventy-five. Then it's a dollar. '—And four bits,' says a fat man with a cigar. '—And a quarter,' you say, just to keep the ball rolling. It really is fun, no? All you have to do is keep saying '—And a quarter,' and sit back and watch your neighbors making fools of themselves. The bidding is up to $13, let us say. '—And a quarter,' you call, waiting for the inevitable. It doesn't happen.

"All of a sudden you are the loneliest person in the world, for it is, 'Gone to the lady for $13.25!' "

Mrs. Gourock said, "About that hanging, or whatever it is, in the frame . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Hadad, offering her a cigarette. "Now once upon a time—no, never mind . . . A rug for a study, eh?"

"Once upon a time what?"

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With a helpless gesture Hadad said, "You are a very dangerous lady. You must know everything. Once upon a time, driven by necessity, I worked as a shill for Mejjid."

"Yes, but what about that?" She pointed to the framed tapestry.

"Madam, are you determined to drive me frantic?" cried Hadad, clutching his head. "I will tell you about it, since you are so insistent. Did you ever hear of the Mighty Mektoub? No, I think not. But you have heard of Casanova? Of Don Juan? Naturally, everybody has. Well, Mektoub was the Syrian Casanova; only Casanova was a mere sower of wild oats, and Don Juan nothing but a juvenile delinquent, compared with Mektoub. His exploits were put into verse by one Shams-ud-Din, in the seventeenth century, but it would take an epic poet like Firdausi, or Homer, to do justice to him as a fighter, a hunter, and, above all, as a lover."

She was all excitement. "I'd like to read it. Where can I get a copy?"

"Dear lady, you cannot—the only known copy of that poem is in the possession of King Farouk. The tapestry you see was Mektoub's bedspread, and it is supposed to convey to its owner some of Mektoub's remarkable powers—"

"And does it? It doesn't!" said Mrs. Gourock. "Does it?"

"Let me proceed," said Hadad. "I say, I was one of Mejjid's shills—to my eternal shame and sorrow—for I spoke little English at that time, and had an aged father to support. And I hated Mejjid, with reason. With excellent reason, but that is private and, in a way, sacred."

"Why?"

"It was not," said Hadad, looking reproachfully at her, "it was not that he underpaid me; that was nothing. It was not that—falsely calling himself Mejjid Effendi, a title to which he had no more right than a pig has to the name of Lion—he publicly humiliated me. For I am descended from the Kings of Edom, madam, and cannot be insulted by an inferior. A Hadad would not own a dog with the pedigree of a Mejjid."

"What was it then?"

Hadad sighed. "I do not know why I tell you this," he murmured. "Simply, by bringing the force of his money to bear upon her father, he married my fiancée, a girl of sixteen."

"How old was Mejjid?"

"Sixty-eight. He had outlived four wives," said Hadad.

"Pretty hard on the poor girl," said Mrs. Gourock.

"It would be cruelty to animals to marry a hyena to the likes of Mejjid. Still, she bore him three daughters, old as he was. Let us not talk of her any more, if you please. I say, I was Mejjid's shill, and his most trusted one, because he knew that as a gentleman I would die sooner than cheat him. These people make capital out of honor," said Hadad.

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"So it was my business to 'buy in' the Mektoub bedspread."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Gourock. "But if Mejjid prized it so highly, why didn't he keep it at home?"

"He took it home with him every evening, after I had brought it back—but it is in the nature of a certain type to derive a thrill from imperiling what they value most. So, with me to trust, Mejjid could enjoy every day the sensation of the reckless gambler whose fortune trembles on the turn of a card, and his overwhelming joy when he is dealt another ace to his pair of aces; although, with me to trust, he could be sure that he risked nothing. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Yes. So I suppose you had a copy made, and—"

"No, dear lady!" said Hadad sharply—while the commentator in his head said: That is just the sort of thing you would have done, you exceedingly horrible woman! "I said, 'My honor was involved.' Even if it had not been, Mejjid would not have been fooled by a substitute."

"I'd just have walked off with it instead of giving it back," said Mrs. Gourock.

Hadad was shocked. "That, sweet lady, is not Hadad's way. I will tell you what I did. Every day or so, you see, I bought the bedspread at Mejjid's auction. I was one of those shills that get the unmistakable bargains, you understand. Mejjid had provided me with a checkbook of the Jersey Provincial bank. The check I signed was, of course, worthless—I signed myself M. Mehrabi, sometimes, or T. F. Hafiz, or Aram Aramian—any name but mine.

"So came the fatal afternoon when I bid for the Mektoub bedspread for the last time. The auctioneer introduced it as a 'rare piece of Persian tapestry, in perfect condition, dating back to the year 1580 A.D.'

"The auctioneer flogged that crowd and yipped at them like a cowboy rounding up cattle. 'Twenty-five, twenty-five, who'll say forty?—Thirty, thirty-five, forty!—Forty, forty, do I hear fifty?—Fifty-five, fifty-five, sixty!—Seventy, seventy, who said eighty?—Eighty, ninety, ninety, and five, ninety-five, one hundred, one hundred'—'Two hundred,' I said, and someone cried '—And fifty!' 'Two hundred and fifty,' cried the auctioneer, 'who says two seventy-five?—Three, I hear three, three, three!—And twenty-five, three twenty-five, three twenty-five, three fifty!'

"He became very brisk then, talked very fast, 'Three fifty, three fifty—going, going—gone to the gentleman over there for three hundred and fifty dollars!—And if you can find a tapestry to equal that on Fifth Avenue for $3,000 I'll eat my hat! . . . Right, now let's see that pair of antique brass candlesticks . . .'

"I took the tapestry with trembling hands, for if the bidding, by

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some chance, had gone $50 higher, my plan would have come to nothing—although the virtue of this same plan was that it could wait another day, or week, or month, if need be. I wrote my check on the Jersey Provincial bank, but this time I signed it with my own name —Mansur Hadad. Then I carried the tapestry away, while the crowd gave its slightly stimulated interest to the next lot.

"I went to my room, and waited. As I expected, Mejjid rang me somewhat later, and shouted, 'Why weren't you here at six?' I replied, 'Because I preferred not to be there at six.' 'I'm coming over,' he said. So he did. He asked for his Mektoub bedspread. I told him. 'It's mine.' Something in my manner must have alarmed him, for he became sweet as honey. 'Of course,' he said, 'I understand—you're playing a little joke on poor old Mejjid. You want a raise, and this is your funny little way of asking for it. He-he-he! Eh?'

"I said to him, 'Mejjid, you son of a dog, you brother of seventeen vile sisters—I cannot properly tell you what I called him, and in any case it loses in the translation—you have seen the last of the Mektoub. Go away, before I beat you about the head with a stick. The transaction is complete. The Mektoub bedspread is mine.'

"He said, 'I don't think you understand American law, little fellow. You have stolen my property and swindled me, and I can send you to prison for a number of years.'

"Feigning innocence, I said, 'The other checks were not good, because I signed them with false names. But this one is good, because I signed it with my own.'

" 'Give me the Mektoub, and we'll forget this folly,' he said. 'Ignorance of the law is no excuse. You have broken the law, but I will forgive you.'

" 'The only law I have broken,' I said, 'is the law that prohibits the keeping of pigs in houses. Go!'

"He said, 'I suppose, in your ignorance, you imagine that I fear a scandal. Ha! I have connections, you little crook, connections—I am wired in, if you understand the phrase.'

" 'I do not,' I said. 'Unless you refer to the fencing farmers use in America to restrain beasts.'

" 'I'll have you in jail tonight,' he shouted, and ran out. Sure enough, in a very short time he returned with a policeman in uniform and another in plainclothes, and had me arrested on a charge of swindling him by passing a worthless check.

"He begged to the last for the Mektoub bedspread. 'Give it to me, and all's forgotten and forgiven,' he cried piteously, until the detective whispered something about compounding a felony.

"I said, 'It is where you'll never find it.' As a matter of fact, Mejjid was standing on it, for I had laid

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it under the cheap hooked rug that was on the floor of my little room. So I went to jail—"

Mrs. Gourock cried, "No! For how long?"

Hadad replied, "For exactly sixteen hours. Mejjid, you see, was so perfectly certain that this last check, like all the others, was so much stage money; he acted impulsively.

"He did not know that I had opened an account in my right name at the Jersey Provincial bank and, by starving myself and living like a worm, had saved $380. That check was good. I had legitimately bought the Mektoub bedspread. It was mine! At all events, it was not Mejjid's. Then I sued him for false arrest.

"He settled out of court for $10,000. 'Your account is paid, O perverter of innocence,' I told him. And with this money, I went into business on my own, dealing in nothing but goods of the most superlative and unquestionable quality and value, adhering always to the honest truth thereafter, so that my brief career as accomplice to Mejjid is behind me—finished—a dream. Mejjid himself, though apparently hale and hearty, suddenly became decrepit, a vegetable, and I married his widow. Now I have told you everything."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Gourock, "is there really any truth in that Mektoub bedspread story? I mean, about making its owner like . . .?"

Hadad shrugged. "That is not for me to say."

"Why not? It's yours, isn't it? And why do you keep it in a frame?"

"Dear lady," said Hadad, "youth needs no enchantments—youth is its own magic. I have had my moments. Now, I keep the Mektoub bedspread in a glazed frame, because it might be more than my life is worth to take it out."

"Why?"

"Madam, I am afraid of it—I have a weak heart. Now, concerning this rug for your husband's study . . ."

"Eh? Oh, that. You choose one," said Mrs. Gourock.

"I have a very rich old Bokhara—the perfect thing for leather-bound books, lamplight, and contemplation—that I can let you have for $3,500."

"Yes, I suppose so. All right, I'll have that. Wrap it up," said Mrs. Gourock, "but do you know, I'm interested in curios. Antiques with a history. You know?"

"Alas, I deal only in carpets and tapestries," said Hadad.

"How much would you want for that Mektoub bedspread?"

"What? I beg your pardon! Its intrinsic value—about $15,000—aside, it has other significances, my good lady," said Hadad, with something like indignation, his hands on his heart.

"Now look—" said Mrs. Gourock, moving. "Listen—" An hour later, gasping painfully, Hadad swallowed a pill.

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"Pray talk no more, ma'am, I have no more strength to argue," he said. "For heaven's sake, take the accursed Mektoub! Give me $20,000 and take it away!"

Mrs. Gourock took out her check book.

"After all, perhaps I am getting a little too tired for even such memories as the Mektoub invokes," said Hadad. "With the Bokhara, it will be $23,500. Do you want the frame, madam?"

"I think not. No, I do not want the frame."

"Dikran, take the Mektoub out of the frame. Now, where shall I send these, good lady?"

"Here's my address," she said, writing on a pad. "Send—" she paused "—wait a moment. Let's get this straight: send the Bokhara rug to Mr. Ingram Gourock, at that address—and put the Mektoub in my car, I'll take it with me."

"If you are not going directly home, sweet lady, it can be delivered before you arrive—"

"It doesn't concern you where I . . . Just put it in my car," said Mrs. Gourock, in some confusion.

When she was gone, Dikran asked, "What shall I put in the frame this time, Mr. Hadad?"

"I will think of something appropriate to its size. First, take this check to the bank at once. And Dikran!"

"Sir?"

"Wipe that silly grin off your face."

"Yes, Mr. Hadad," said Dikran.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR: | **A. A. MILNE** |
| TITLE: | ***Once a Murderer . . .*** |
| TYPE: | Detective Story |
| DETECTIVE: | Superintendent Frederick Mortimer |
| LOCALE: | England |
| TIME: | Not *too* long ago |
| COMMENTS: | *The famous creator of Winnie-the-Pooh presents a remarkable "adventure in deduction," with enough plot and by-plot for at least a novelette . . . Ah, the simple way of committing a murder!* |

I AM IN A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT, as you will see directly. I don't know what to do . . .

"One of the maxims which I have found most helpful in my career at Scotland Yard," the superintendent was saying, "has been the simple one that appearances are not always deceptive. A crime may be committed exactly as it seems to have been committed and exactly as it was intended to be committed." He helped himself and passed the bottle.

"I don't think I follow you," I said, hoping to lead him on.

I am a writer of detective stories. If you have never heard of me, it can only be because you don't read detective stories. I wrote *Murder on the Back Stairs* and *The Mystery of the Twisted Eglantine,* to mention only two of my successes.

It was this fact, I think, which first interested Superintendent Frederick Mortimer in me, and, of course, me in him. He is a big fellow with the face of a Roman Emperor; I am the small neat type. We gradually became friends and so got into the habit of dining together once a month. He liked talking about his cases, and naturally I liked listening. But this eve-

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ning the wine seemed to be making itself felt.

"I don't think I follow you," I said again.

"I mean that the simple way of committing a murder is often the best way. This doesn't mean that the murderer is a man of simple mind. On the contrary. He is subtle enough to know that the simple solution is too simple to be credible."

This sounded anything but simple, so I said, "Give me an example."

"Well, take the case of the bottle of wine which was sent to the Marquis of Hedingham on his birthday. Have I never told you about it?"

"Never," I said, and I helped myself and passed the bottle.

He filled his glass and considered. "Give me a moment to get it clear," he said. "It was a long time ago." While he closed his eyes and let the past drift before him, I ordered up another bottle of the same.

"Yes," said Mortimer, opening his eyes. "I've got it now."

I leaned forward, listening eagerly. This is the story . . .

The first we heard of it at the Yard (said Mortimer) was a brief announcement over the telephone that the Marquis of Hedingham's butler had died suddenly at His Lordship's town house in Brook Street, and that poison was suspected. This was at seven o'clock. We went around at once.

Inspector Totman had been put in charge of the case; I was a young detective sergeant at the time, and I generally worked under Totman.

He was a brisk, military sort of fellow, with a little prickly ginger mustache, good at his job in a showy, orthodox way; but he had no imagination, and he was thinking all the time of what Inspector Totman would get out of it.

Quite frankly I didn't like him. Outwardly we kept friendly, for it doesn't do to quarrel with one's superiors; indeed, he was vain enough to think that I had a great admiration for him; but I knew that he was just using me for his own advantage, and I had a shrewd suspicion that I should have been promoted before this, if he hadn't wanted to keep me under him so that he could profit by my brains.

We found the butler in the pantry, stretched out on the floor. An open bottle of Tokay, a broken wine glass with the dregs of the liquid still in it, the medical evidence of poisoning—all helped to build up the story for us. The wine had arrived about an hour before, with the card of Sir William Kelso attached to it. On the card was a typewritten message, saying, "Bless you, Tommy, and here's something to celebrate with." I can't remember the exact words, of course, but that was the idea.

Apparently it was His Lordship's birthday, and he was having a small family party of about six peo-

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ple for the occasion. Sir William Kelso, I should explain, was his oldest friend and a relation by marriage, Lord Hedingham having married his sister; in fact, Sir William was to have been one of the party present that evening. He was a bachelor, about fifty, devoted to his nephew and nieces.

Well, the butler had brought up the bottle and the card to His Lordship—this was about six o'clock; and Lord Hedingham, as he told us, had taken the card, said something like, "Good old Bill. We'll have that tonight, Perkins," and Perkins had said, "Very good, My Lord," and gone out again with the bottle. The card had been left lying on the table.

Afterwards, there could be little doubt what had happened. Perkins had opened the bottle with the intention of decanting it but had been unable to resist the temptation to sample it first. I suspect that in his time he had sampled most of His Lordship's wine but had never before come across a Tokay of such richness. So he had poured himself out a full glass, drunk it, and died almost immediately.

"Good heavens!" I interrupted. "But how extremely providential—I mean, of course, for Lord Hedingham and the others."

"Exactly," said Mortimer.

The contents of the bottle were analyzed (he went on) and found to contain a more-than-fatal dose of prussic acid. Of course we did all the routine things. With young Roberts, a nice young fellow who often worked with us, I went around to all the chemists' shops in the neighborhood. Totman examined everybody from Sir William and Lord Hedingham down. Roberts and I also took the bottle round to all the wine merchants in the neighborhood. At the end of a week all we could say was this:

One: The murderer had a motive for murdering Lord Hedingham; or, possibly, somebody at his party; or, possibly, the whole party. In accordance with the usual custom, His Lordship would be the first to taste the wine. A sip would not be fatal, and in a wine of such richness the taste might not be noticeable; so that the whole party would then presumably drink His Lordship's health. He would raise his glass to them, and in this way they would all take the poison, and be affected according to how deeply they drank.

On the other hand, His Lordship might take a good deal more than a sip in the first place, and so be the only one to suffer. My deduction from this was that the motive was revenge rather than gain. The criminal would avenge himself on Lord Hedingham if His Lordship or *any* of his family were seriously poisoned; he could only profit if *definite* people were definitely *killed*. It took a little time to get Totman to see this, but he did eventually agree.

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Two: The murderer had been able to obtain one of Sir William Kelso's cards, and knew that John Richard Mervyn Plantaganet Carlow, tenth Marquis of Hedingham, was called "Tommy" by his intimates. Totman deducted from this that he was therefore one of the Hedingham-Kelso circle of relations and friends.

I disputed this. I pointed out: (a) that it was to strangers rather than to intimate friends that cards were presented, except in the case of formal calls, when they were left in a bowl or tray in the hall, and anybody could steal one; (b) that the fact that Lord Hedingham was called Tommy must have appeared in society papers and be known to many people; and, most convincing of all, (c) that the murderer did *not* know that Sir William Kelso was to be in the party that night. For obviously some reference would have been made to the gift, either on his arrival or when the wine was served; whereupon he would have disclaimed any knowledge of it, and the bottle would immediately have been suspected. As it was, of course, Perkins had drunk from it before Sir William's arrival.

Now both Sir William and Lord Hedingham assured us that they *always* dined together on each other's birthday, and they were convinced that any personal friend of theirs would have been aware of the fact. I made Totman question them about this, and he then came round to my opinion.

Three: There was nothing to prove that the wine in the bottle corresponded to the label; and wine experts were naturally reluctant to taste it for us. All they could say from the smell was that it was a Tokay of sorts. This, of course, made it more difficult for us. In fact, I may say that neither from the purchase of the wine nor the nature of the poison did we get any clue.

We had, then, the following picture of the murderer. He had a cause of grievance, legitimate or fancied, against Lord Hedingham, and did not scruple to take the most terrible revenge. He knew that Sir William Kelso was a friend of His Lordship and called him Tommy, and that he might reasonably give him a bottle of wine on his birthday. He did *not* know that Sir William would be dining there that night; that is to say, *even as late as six o'clock that evening, he did not know*. He was not likely, therefore, to be anyone at present employed or living in Lord Hedingham's house. Finally, he had had an opportunity to get hold of a card of Sir William's.

As it happened, there was somebody who fitted completely into this picture. It was a fellow called—wait a bit—Merrivale, Medley—oh, well, it doesn't matter. Merton, that was it. Merton. He had been His Lordship's valet for six months, had

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been suspected of stealing, and had been dismissed without a character reference. Just the man we wanted.

So for a fortnight we searched for Merton. And then, when at last we got on to him, we discovered that he had the most complete alibi imaginable.

Yes, I know what you're going to say, what you detective-story writers always say—the better an alibi, the worse it is. Well, sometimes, I admit; but not in this case. For Merton was in jail, under another name, and he had been inside for the last two months. And what do you think he was suspected of, and was waiting trial for? Oh, well, of course you guess; I've as good as told you. He was on a charge of murder—and murder, mark you, by poison.

"Good heavens!" I interjected. I seized the opportunity to refill my friend's glass. He said, "Exactly," and took a long drink.

You can imagine (he went on) what a shock this was to us. You see, a certain sort of murder had been committed; we had deduced that it was done by a certain man, without knowing whether he was in the least capable of such a crime; and now, having proved to the hilt he *was* capable of it, we had simultaneously proved that he *didn't* do it.

I said to Totman, "Let's take a couple of days off, and each of us think it out, then pool our ideas and start afresh."

Totman frisked up his little mustache and laughed in his conceited way. "You don't think I'm going to admit myself wrong, do you, when I've just proved I'm right?" (Totman saying "I," when he had got everything from me!) "Merton's my man. He'd got the bottle ready, and somebody else delivered it for him. That's all. He had to wait for the birthday, you see, and when he found himself in prison, his wife or somebody—"

"—took round the bottle, all nicely labeled 'Poison; not to be delivered till Christmas Day.'" I had to say it, I was so annoyed with him.

"Don't be more of a damned fool than you can help," he shouted, "and don't be insolent, or you'll get into trouble."

I apologized humbly and told him how much I liked working with him. He forgave me, and we were friends again. He patted me on the shoulder.

"You take a day off," he said kindly, "you've been working too hard. Take a bus into the country and make up a good story for me—the story of that bottle, and how it came from Merton's lodging to Brook Street, and who took it and why. I admit I don't see it at present, but that's the bottle, you can bet your life. I'm going down to Leatherhead. Report here on Friday morning, and we'll see what we've got. My birthday as it happens, and I feel I'm going to be lucky."

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Leatherhead was where an old woman had been poisoned. That was the third time in a week he'd told me when his birthday was.

I got a bus to Hampstead Heath. I walked round the Leg of Mutton Pond twenty times. And each time that I went round, Totman's theory seemed sillier than the last time. And each time I felt more and more strongly that we were being *forced* into an entirely artificial interpretation of things. It sounds fantastic, I know, but I could almost feel the murderer behind us, pushing us along the way he wanted us to go.

I sat down on a seat and filled a pipe, and I said, "Right! The murderer's a man who wanted me to believe all that I have believed. When I've told myself that the murderer intended to do so-and-so, he intended me to believe that, and therefore he *didn't* do so-and-so. When I've told myself that the murderer wanted to mislead me, he wanted me to think he wanted to mislead me, which meant that the truth was exactly as it seemed to be. Now then, Fred, you'll begin all over again, and you'll take things as they *are* and won't be too clever about them. Because the murderer expects you to be clever, and wants you to be clever, and from now on you aren't going to take your orders from *him*."

And of course, the first thing which leaped to my mind was that the murderer *meant* to murder the butler!

It seemed incredible now that we could ever have missed it. Didn't every butler sample his master's wines? Why, it was an absolute certainty that Perkins would be the first victim of a poisoned bottle of a very special vintage. What butler could resist pouring himself a glass as he decanted it?

Wait, though. Mustn't be in a hurry. Two objections. One: Perkins might be the one butler in a thousand who wasn't a wine sampler. Two: Even if he were like any other butler, he might be out of sorts on that particular evening and have put by a glass to drink later. Wouldn't it be much too risky for a murderer who only wanted to destroy Perkins, and had no grudge against Lord Hedingham's family, to depend so absolutely on the butler drinking first?

For a little while this held me up, but not for long. Suddenly I saw the complete solution.

It would *not* be risky if (a) the murderer had certain knowledge of the butler's habits; and (b) could, if necessary, at the last moment, prevent the family from drinking. In other words, if he were an intimate of the family, were himself present at the party, and, without bringing suspicion on himself, could bring the wine under suspicion.

In other words, only if he were Sir William Kelso! For Sir William was the only man in the world who could say, "Don't drink this wine. I'm supposed to have sent it to you,

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and I didn't, so that proves it's a fake." The *only* man.

Why hadn't we suspected him from the beginning? One reason, of course, was that we had supposed the intended victim to be one of the Hedingham family, and of Sir William's devotion to his sister, brother-in-law, nephew, and nieces, there was never any doubt. But the chief reason was our assumption that the last thing a murderer would do would be to give himself away by sending his own card round with the poisoned bottle. "The *last* thing a murderer would do"—and therefore the first thing a really clever murderer would do.

To make my case complete to myself, for I had little hope as yet of converting Totman, I had to establish motive. Why should Sir William want to murder Perkins?

I gave myself the pleasure of having tea that afternoon with Lord Hedingham's housekeeper. We had caught each other's eye on other occasions when I had been at the house, and—well, I suppose I can say it now—I had a way with the women in those days.

When I left, I knew two things. Perkins had been generally unpopular, not only downstairs but upstairs. "It was a wonder how they put up with him." And Her Ladyship had been "a different woman lately."

"How different?" I asked.

"So much younger, if you know what I mean, Sergeant Mortimer. Almost like a girl again, bless her heart."

I did know. And that was that. Blackmail.

What was I to do? What did my evidence amount to? Nothing. It was all circumstantial evidence. If Kelso had done one suspicious thing, or left one real clue, then the story I had made up would have convinced any jury. As it was, in the eyes of a jury he had done one completely unsuspicious thing and had left one real clue to his innocence—his visiting card. Totman would just laugh at me.

I disliked the thought of being laughed at by Totman. I wondered how I could get the laugh on him. I took a bus to Baker Street, and walked into Regent's Park, not minding where I was going, but just thinking. And then, as I got opposite Hanover Terrace, who should I see but young Roberts.

"Hallo, young fellow, what have *you* been up to?"

"Hallo, Sarge," he grinned. "Been calling on my old school chum, Sir William Kelso—or rather, his valet. Tottie thought he might have known Merton. Speaking as one valet to another, so to speak."

"Is Inspector Totman back?" I asked.

Roberts stood to attention, and said, "No, Sergeant Mortimer, Inspector Totman is not expected to return from Leatherhead, Surrey, until a late hour tonight."

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You couldn't be angry with the boy. At least, I couldn't. He had no respect for anybody, but he was a good lad. And he had an eye like a hawk. Saw everything and forgot none of it.

I said, "I didn't know Sir William lived up this way."

Roberts pointed across the road. "Observe the august mansion. Five minutes ago you'd have found me in the basement, talking to a housemaid who thought Merton was a town in Surrey. As it is, of course."

I had a sudden crazy idea.

"Well, now you're going back there," I said. "I'm going to call on Sir William, and I want you handy. Would they let you in at the basement again, or are they sick of you?"

"Sarge, they just love me. When I went, they said, 'Must you go?' "

We say at the Yard, "Once a murderer, always a murderer." Perhaps that was why I had an absurd feeling that I should like young Roberts within call. Because I was going to tell Sir William Kelso what I'd been thinking about by the Leg of Mutton Pond. I'd only seen him once, but he gave me the idea of being the sort of man who wouldn't mind killing, but didn't like lying. I thought he would give himself away . . . and then—well, there might be a roughhouse, and Roberts would be useful.

As we walked in at the gate together, I looked in my pocketbook for a card. Luckily I had one left, though it wasn't very clean. It was a bit ink-stained, in fact. Roberts, who never missed anything, said, "Personally I always use blotting paper," and went on whistling. If I hadn't known him, I shouldn't have known what he was talking about. I said, "Oh, do you?" and rang the bell.

I gave the maid my card and asked if Sir William could see me, and at the same time Roberts gave her a wink and indicated the back door. She nodded to him, and asked me to come in. Roberts went down and waited for her in the basement. I felt safer.

Sir William was a big man, as big as I was. But of course a lot older. He said, "Well, Sergeant, what can I do for you?" twiddling my card in his fingers. He seemed quite friendly about it. "Sit down, won't you?"

I said, "I think I'll stand, Sir William. I want just to ask you one question, if I may?" Yes, I know I was crazy, but somehow I felt inspired.

"By all means," he said, obviously not much interested.

"When did you first discover that Perkins was blackmailing Lady Hedingham?"

He was standing in front of his big desk, and I was opposite him. He stopped fiddling with my card and became absolutely still; and there was a silence so complete that I could feel it in every nerve of my body. I kept my eyes on his, you

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may be sure. We stood there, I don't know how long.

"Is that the only question?" he asked. The thing that frightened me was that his voice was just the same as before. Ordinary.

"Well, just one more. Have you a typewriter in your house?" Just corroborative evidence, but it told him that I knew.

He gave a long sigh, tossed the card into the wastepaper basket, and walked to the window. He stood there with his back to me, looking out but seeing nothing. Thinking. He must have stood there for a couple of minutes. Then he turned around, and to my amazement he had a friendly smile on his face. "I think we'd better sit."

"There is a typewriter in the house which I sometimes use," he began. "I daresay you use one too."

"I do."

"And so do thousands of other people—including, it may be, the murderer you are looking for."

"Thousands of people, including the murderer," I agreed.

He noticed the difference, and smiled. "People" I had said, not "other people." And I didn't say I was looking for him. Because I had found him.

"And then," I went on, "there was the actual wording of the typed message."

"Was there anything remarkable about it?"

"No. Except that it was exactly right," I said.

"Oh, my dear fellow, anyone could have got it right. A simple birthday greeting."

"Anyone in your own class, Sir William, who knew you both. But that's all. It's Inspector Totman's birthday tomorrow." I added to myself: As he keeps telling us, damn him! "If I sent him a bottle of whiskey, young Roberts—that's the constable who's in on this case; you may have seen him about, he's waiting for me now down below"—I thought this was rather a neat way of getting that in— "Roberts could make a guess at what I'd say, and so could anybody at the Yard who knows us both, and they wouldn't be far wrong. But *you* couldn't."

He looked at me. He couldn't take his eyes off me. I wondered what he was thinking. At last he said, "You'd probably say, 'A long life and all the best, with the admiring good wishes of—' How's that?"

It was devilish. First that he had really been thinking it out when he had so much else to think about, and then that he'd got it so right. That "admiring" which meant that he'd studied Totman just as he was studying me, and knew how I'd play up to him.

"You see," he smiled, "it isn't really difficult. And the fact that my card was used is in itself convincing evidence of my innocence, don't you think?"

"To a jury perhaps," I said, "but not to me."

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"I wish I could convince *you,*" he murmured to himself. "Well, what are you doing about it?"

"I shall, of course, put my reconstruction of the case in front of Inspector Totman tomorrow."

"Ah! A nice birthday surprise for him. And knowing your Totman, what do you think he will do?"

He had me there, and knew it.

"I think *you* know him too, Sir," I said.

"I do," he smiled.

"And me, I daresay, and anybody else you meet. Quick as lightning. But even ordinary men like me have a sort of sudden understanding of people sometimes. As I've got of you. Sir. And I've a sort of feeling that, if ever we get you into a witness box, and you've taken the oath, you won't find perjury so much to your liking as murder. Or what the law calls murder."

"But *you* don't?" he said quickly.

"I think," I said, "that there are a lot of people who *ought* to be killed. But I'm a policeman, and what I think isn't evidence. You killed Perkins, didn't you?"

He nodded; and then said, almost with a grin at me, "A nervous affection of the head, if you put it in evidence. I could get a specialist to swear to it."

My God, he was a good sort of man. I was really sorry when they found him next day, after he'd put a bullet through his head. And yet what else could he do? He knew I should get him.

I was furious with Fred Mortimer. That was no way to end a story. Suddenly, like that.

"My dear little friend," he said, "it isn't the end. We're just coming to the exciting part. This will make your hair curl."

"Oh!" I said sarcastically. "Then I suppose all that you've told me so far is just introduction?"

"That's right. Now you listen. On Friday morning, before we heard of Sir William's death, I went in to report to Inspector Totman. He wasn't there. Nobody knew where he was. They rang up his apartment house. Now hold tight to the leg of the table or something. When the porter got into his flat, he found Totman's body. Poisoned."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"You may say so. There he was, and on the table was a newly opened bottle of whiskey, and by the side of it a visiting card. And whose card do you think it was? *Mine!* And what do you think it said? 'A long life and all the best, with the admiring good wishes of —' *me!*"

Lucky for me I had had young Roberts with me. Lucky for me he had this genius for noticing and remembering. Lucky for me he could swear to the exact shape of the smudge of ink on that card. And I might add, lucky for me that they believed me when I told them word for word what had been said at my interview with Sir William, as I have just told you.

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"I was reprimanded, of course, for exceeding my duty, as I most certainly had, but that was only official. Unofficially they were very pleased with me. We couldn't prove anything, naturally, and Sir William's suicide was left unexplained. But a month later I was promoted to Inspector."

Mortimer fixed his glass and drank, while I revolved his extraordinary story in my mind.

"The theory," I said, polishing my glasses thoughtfully, "was, I suppose, that Sir William sent the poisoned whiskey, not so much to get rid of Totman, from whom he had little to fear, as to discredit you by bringing you under suspicion, and to discredit entirely your own theory of the other murder."

"Exactly."

"And then, at the last moment, he realized that he couldn't go on with it, or the weight of his crimes became suddenly too much for him, or—"

"Something of the sort. Nobody ever knew, of course."

I looked across the table with sudden excitement, almost with awe.

"Do you remember what he said to you?" I asked, giving the words their full meaning as I slowly quoted them. "'The fact that my card was used is in itself convincing evidence of my innocence . . .' And you said, 'Not to me.' And he said, 'I wish I could convince *you.' And that was how he did it!* The fact that your card was used *was* convincing evidence of your innocence!"

"With the other things. The proof that he was in possession of the particular card of mine which was used, and the certainty that he had committed the other murder. Once a poisoner, always a poisoner."

"True . . . yes . . . Well, thanks very much for the story, Fred. All the same, you know," I said, shaking my head at him, "it doesn't altogether prove what you set out to prove."

"What was that?"

"That the simple explanation is generally the true one. In the case of Perkins, yes. But not in the case of Totman."

"Sorry, I don't follow."

"My dear fellow," I said, putting up a finger to emphasize my point, for he seemed a little hazy with the wine suddenly, "the *simple* explanation of Totman's death—surely?—would have been that *you* had sent him the poisoned whiskey."

Superintendent Mortimer looked a little surprised. "But I did," he said.

So now you see my terrible predicament. I could hardly listen as he went on dreamily, "I never liked Totman, and he stood in my way; but I hadn't seriously thought of getting rid of him until I got that card into my hands again. As I told you, Sir William dropped it into the basket and turned to the window, and I thought: Damn it, *you*

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:an afford to chuck about visiting :ards, but I can't. It's the only one 've got left, and if you don't want t, I do.'

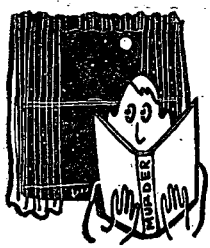
"So I bent down very naturally o tie my shoelace and felt in the ›asket behind me, because, of :ourse, it was rather an undigni-ied thing to do, and I didn't want o be seen; and just as I was put-ing it into my pocket I saw that nk smudge again, and I remem-›ered that Roberts had seen it. And n a flash the whole plan came to ne; simple; foolproof. And from hat moment everything I said to ›im was in preparation for it.

"Of course we were quite alone, ›ut you never knew who might be istening, and besides"—he twid-dled the stem of his wine glass—'p'raps I'm like Sir William, rather ell the truth than not. And it was rue, all of it—how Sir William :ame to know about Totman's birthday, and knew that those were the very words I should have used myself.

"Don't think I wanted to put anything on to Sir William that wasn't his. I liked him. But he as good as told me he wasn't going to wait for what was coming to him, and he'd done one murder anyway. That was why I slipped down with the bottle that evening and left it outside Totman's flat. Didn't dare wait till the morning, in case Sir William closed his account that night."

He stood up and stretched himself. "Ah, well, it was a long time ago. Goodbye old man, I must be off. Thanks for a grand dinner. Don't forget, you're dining with *me* next Tuesday. I've got a new Burgundy for you. You'll like it."

He drained his wine glass and swaggered out, leaving me to my thoughts.

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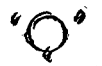
## *the newest* WITHERS *and* MALONE *dipsydoodle*

*By this time readers know that John J. Malone, the little criminal lawyer with an irrepressible fondness for wine, women, and song, can wiggle and wriggle himself into seemingly impossible predicaments; and that Hildegarde Withers, the prim and prudish (in comparison with Malone) spinster-schoolteacher-snooper can extricate the perennially hungover John J.—if anyone can! But, as always, the extricating process is rife with risk and full o' fun . . .*

*A note on the nature of collaboration: the stories double-featuring Withers and Malone are still signed by Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice. Until her death in 1957, Craig Rice worked with Stuart Palmer on the Withers-and-Malone misadventures, and in this active collaboration the two writers produced four 'tec-team stories. After Craig Rice's death in 1957, we published "Withers and Malone, Brain-Stormers" (issue of February 1959) and now we offer "Withers and Malone, Crime-Busters." How were these fifth and sixth tales of the schoolteacher and the lawyer as partners-in-crime-and-detection possible?*

*Well, Craig Rice, on her death, left memoranda of potential gimmicks, possible characters, pieces of dialogue and description—enough for Mr. Palmer to pick out a starting point (or, perhaps, an ending point) or find a plot inspiration in some Craigean scrap or Ricean fragment. In this new short novel of man(and woman)hunting Malone and homicide-hunting Hildegarde, the germ that germinated in Stuart Palmer's fertile imagination may have grown into something like this: a man is charged and tried for murder, and gets off with his life; the clever Mr. Malone then persuades the accused to let Malone, the great criminal lawyer, defend him in a retrial; and lo!—this time the accused winds up worse than before—instead of saving the accused's life, the magnificent meddling Malone loses it!*

*Take it from there, dear reader—light and lively!*





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# WITHERS AND MALONE, CRIME-BUSTERS

*by STUART PALMER and CRAIG RICE*

"DON'T LOOK AT ME SO ASKANCE!" said John J. Malone as he crept into his office at 2 p.m. "I can't stand much more."

"You could stand a bromo," said the faithful Maggie. Then she saw his eyes turn hopefully toward the Emergency file. "You took the bottle with you when you left last night. That was just after you borrowed my last ten dollars."

The little lawyer winced at the noise of the bromo, but he raised the glass, squaring his shoulders under the nearly new, somewhat rumpled, dove-gray Finchley suit. "To the memory of my once illustrious career," he toasted hollowly.

"I gather you had no luck last night."

"You gather correctly. I hit every saloon from here to the boondocks —but never a trace of the missing Mr. Taras. They've got him hid, all right." Malone sighed. "The latter part of the evening is a blur—in fact, I seem to have had a blackout. However, I just might have stumbled on something; I found a string tied around my finger when I woke up in a Turkish bath, I find I wrote a check without filling in the stub, and I seem to remember the name Little Helga, but that's all."

"I hope the check was for under $3.65," Maggie told him. "Because that's the current bank balance."

The little lawyer searched his pockets, fished out a lone cigar with a greenstick fracture, which he tried vainly to light. "Maggie dear, you can put this down in your diary as Black Wednesday."

"Only it's Thursday," she corrected. "Which means that our client dies in less than a week, and then it's *your* turn to go before the grand jury, as if we both didn't know."

They were silent for a long minute —which was more than could be said for the apparition in raincoat and umbrella which suddenly swooped in on them like a large raven looking for a bust of Pallas Athene on which to perch. But this bird did not croak, "Nevermore"; it only cried, "Malone! Maggie! Here I am!" Miss Hildegarde Withers, whom they had thought safely busy with her own pursuits in faraway California, now warmly embraced them both. "I came as soon as I heard how bad it was," she told them.

"Welcome to the wake," Malone told her.

"Fiddlesticks! You can't win 'em all—this Coleman case was lost even before you got hold of it."

"Yes? Well, Junior Coleman only got life at the first trial, when he



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was defended by his rich father's stuffy old law firm. I won him a new trial and what did *I* get him? A death sentence!"

"I'm more worried about this subornation charge against you."

"Leaving ethics out of it, when did I ever have a thousand dollars at one time?—for bribery or any other purpose."

"A good point. What steps are you taking, Malone?"

"Looking for clues," said Maggie. "And in the usual place—at the bottom of a bottle."

"I was trying to locate that witness, Taras, who said in court that I'd tried to bribe him. He disappeared right after the trial. And just maybe I did get a lead on him last night." He told about the string on his finger, the missing check, and the name "Little Helga."

"Probably a tip on a horse," said Miss Withers. "Well, I know it's always been your proudest boast that you never lost a client, but you must accept what you cannot change. You did your best—"

"There isn't even a chance that the Governor will intervene," Maggie put in. "Our client as good as confessed to a reporter who got to him in the death cell yesterday. Said he can't remember having done it, and he must have been crazy to do a terrible thing like that—but he's resigned to his fate."

"*He's* resigned!" yelped Malone. "Junior can't do this to me—he's stir-crazy, that's what he is!"

"It's too late for an insanity plea," Hildegarde moaned, "but something *must* be done. Mary Margaret O'Leary, don't just stand there. Coffee is indicated—black and piping." She shooed the secretary on her way, then firmly sat herself down on the edge of a hard chair. "I've been too occupied to follow the case closely. Fill me in, Malone."

"You mean who did what and with which and to whom, as in the old limerick?" The criminal lawyer grinned feebly. "Well, at three a.m. one foggy morning more than a year ago a canary billed only as 'Jeanine' came out of Le Jazz Hot, a joint on Sixty-third Street, said good night to the doorman, and cut across the street toward her apartment. A dark, open sports car came out of nowhere, without any lights, and—curtains for the canary. The girl always finished her last turn and left at just about that time, and she always wore a distinctive pastel mink coat—so all the killer had to do was to wait up the street with his motor idling until she stepped off the curb. At least, that was the theory of Captain von Flanagan."

Miss Withers remembered that worthy Homicide officer from many previous cases, and nodded. "Thumb-fingered, but a bulldog."

"That's von F. At first the police had no clues worth a darn. The girl was supposed, around the club, to have a secret lover, but she kept to herself, and it was always 'hands

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off with the customers.' But she had more jewels and furs than her $200 a week salary from the club would justify."

"But wasn't there a husband in the picture? I seem to remember—"

"An ex-husband—a Navy man she'd divorced in Mexico a couple of years ago while he was still at sea. Name of CPO Johan Zimmer, recently assigned to Great Lakes Naval Training Station up the shore. But that was all over; after the divorce he never tried to look her up or showed any further interest."

"Which seems odd. And of course he had a perfect alibi?"

"Fair. He'd been on shore leave, but half a dozen of his mates swore they were together at a dive in Cicero whooping it up that night. As a matter of fact, the police would never have known he existed if the guy hadn't come forward to try to see if he couldn't inherit Jeanine's fur coats and jewelry, on the ground the Mexican divorce was invalid. But he had no access to a car—and certainly not to a late-model Jaguar which is what the doorman decided the murder car was, after he'd been shown a lot of photos by the police; and there was no trace of Zimmer having hired a car—the police checked thoroughly.

"Well, von Flanagan got from Motor Vehicles a list of all registered Jag owners in Cook County. Finally he came to the name of Walter A. Coleman, Jr., playboy socialite and heir to several million bucks when and if his invalid father up in Evanston ever kicks the bucket. At first Junior seemed in the clear. His dark-green Jaguar showed no signs of having been in a crash, or in a body-shop either. Junior's name had never been linked with Jeanine's in the gossip columns, and no credible witnesses ever came forward to swear they'd seen the couple together.

"Junior denied they'd had an affair. He claimed his car had been safe in the basement garage of his apartment building that night, and that from about one p.m. on he'd been cuddling with a female guest whose name he gallantly refused to divulge. But he was just the type to fit the role of the guy everybody was sure Jeanine was carrying on with—"

"But surely they'd have been seen at least once—at his place or hers."

"She lived in a walkup, and the elevator man and garage attendant at his apartment left at midnight. There are motels, and lots of bars and night spots where there's only candlelight; also, Jeanine had several costume wigs, those fancy things made of real human hair—so she was never recognized except when she wanted to be. Anyway that was the picture the authorities were painting. Junior had reasons for secrecy, he was mixed up in a divorce that wasn't final, and his father had threatened to disown him if he didn't quit helling around—"

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"Circumstantial evidence—every bit of it—and no real motive," the spinster schoolteacher objected.

"Listen, Hildy. Max Taras, the doorman, was an eyewitness. He finally remembered that the driver of the car had been wearing a beret and smoking a pipe, both of which fitted Junior. That identification—"

"The man saw a lot on a dark and foggy night and in only a few seconds," Miss Withers remarked witheringly. "So Junior was arrested?"

"He was. And he came up with his alibi, which was confirmed by the lady who admitted spending the night with him. It turned out to be his ex-wife Frances, bluest blood in North Shore Chicago. She'd been out in Santa Barbara for a year, watching the boys play polo and getting herself a California decree. Now she was back, and she claimed that on that fateful day she'd got sentimental and phoned Junior because it would have been their wedding anniversary. One thing had led to another, and they'd had dinner at the Beachcomber's and then done the town, coming back to his apartment a little after one. That was her story, though she indignantly refused the polygraph test when it was suggested."

Hildegarde sniffed. "Even *I* wouldn't call staying out until one o'clock 'doing the town'! But a lady would hardly make up the story—it must have been embarrassing."

"The divorce wouldn't have been final for months yet. Frances made a good defense witness. She ridiculed the D.A.'s insinuation that Junior could have slipped out and come back without waking her. She said they hadn't even used the Jaguar that night, because they were going to take the champagne route and Junior already had a couple of drunk-driving charges—"

"I don't see where his car comes into it, anyway, since you say there were no marks on it. I have always understood that modern scientific methods—"

"Yes, but the police came up with a lap robe, torn and bloody, shoved into a refuse can a block from where Junior lived. Von Flanagan figured it had been draped over the hood of Junior's Jaguar as a sort of buffer."

"The man gets cleverer as the years go on!"

"You haven't heard the worst. The value of Frances' testimony was completely negated when the authorities turned up a surprise witness—a private eye named Finch who swore that Frances Coleman, while still out on the coast, had retained him to shadow Junior! She couldn't deny it, so she tried to explain it away by saying she just wanted to find out if he was pining for her or had found comfort somewhere else. Only the snooper, Finch, admitted he'd been stringing his client along and taking her money for nothing—he swore he hadn't always tailed his quarry because the Jag could outrun his old Ford."

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Miss Withers was busily making notes. "I already smell a dozen rats. Tell me more about the victim, Malone."

"Lovely and cold," said the little lawyer. "She sang naughty French songs in a teasing bedroom voice, and she was stacked like—"

"Spare me the vital statistics. Do you speak only from hearsay?"

"Well, I might have caught her act once or twice, and sent her an orchid or two in tribute to a lovely artiste. But I never got to first base—she wouldn't even take a drink with me." He sighed. "One thing more. The D.A.'s men found an autographed photo of Jeanine, wearing nothing but Chanel Number Five as the saying goes, under a blotter on Junior's desk. It was warmly inscribed—and how."

"That would link them together beyond a doubt."

"So the jury thought. But those photos were widely circulated. I myself might have one somewhere in my hotel room. She signed 'em for everybody—and all of 'em with love and kisses. I managed to bring out at the second trial that the photo hadn't been found by the police when they first searched the place—it was the D.A.'s men who later 'discovered' it. The way they discovered pipe tobacco exactly like Junior's brand in Jeanine's wastepaper basket."

"Well, Malone! You as his attorney must know—*were* they lovers?"

"A privileged communication, but—frankly, yes. But he denied absolutely that she'd been putting the heat on him and demanding marriage; she was perfectly satisfied with things as they were."

"A likely story! No woman is ever satisfied with things as they are. But go on."

"Anyway, I had to go and stick my finger in the electric fan. I'd followed the first trial, and I'd seen Deputy D.A. Hamilton make fools out of the defense, which was mostly handled by young Gerald Adams, not too long out of Harvard Law School and no criminal attorney at all—though he seems to have ambitions in that direction. He got his big chance only because old man Coleman trusted Gittel and Adams, who'd always handled his legal affairs. After the first verdict I got word to Junior in his cell that I believed I could get him a new trial on the grounds of prejudice and judicial error, so he dumped his lawyers and retained me."

"You seem to have been borrowing trouble."

"Borrowing? I won permanent possession. But I'd found out that when the doorman, Taras, was first questioned by the police, he said all he saw was an open sports car with no lights come roaring out of nowhere. The stuff about the pipe and the beret and the similarity to Junior's boyish face came after Taras had been locked up for weeks and practically brainwashed by the D.A.'s men—and

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after they'd showed him a lot of composite photos of Junior in his car, wearing a beret and smoking a pipe! I got to this Taras and found him plenty sore at the way he'd been shoved around; he opened up and promised to tell the truth at the second trial—and without any inducement from me, though maybe he expected the Coleman estate would take care of him later. So comes the trial, and he corrects his testimony just as he promised, and just as I think he's making a big impression on the jury, he wilts under re-cross-examination, reverts to his original testimony, and swears that I'd come to him and offered him a thousand dollars to change his story! That took the wind out of my sails, and the jury brought in a verdict of guilty *without* a recommendation. That was that."

"And a pretty kettle of fish it is!"

"You haven't heard the half of it. Right after Junior was sentenced to die, his father finally kicked the bucket, leaving nobody to inherit—"

"You mean he'd changed his will, and cut his son off?"

"No—but a man under sentence of death is *not legally alive*, and can't inherit a dime. Look it up, it's the law. I had no claim against the estate, because Junior had retained me against his father's wishes. Not only did I get no fee, but I'm stuck with the cost of the appeals!"

"A pity. But you have more than money at stake now, Malone."

"You can say that again. The only reason I'm not under indictment already is that a man under sentence of death is entitled to his attorney's services right up to the end. When my client dies, next Wednesday at dawn, the ax falls on me. Sometimes I'd like to change places with him."

"What a depressing thought! But the question is—what can we *do?*"

"I don't know about you, but I'm going out and get plastered!"

Miss Withers was shocked. "Malone, what utter madness—and at a time like this!"

"There is madness in my method, or do I mean vice versa? But seriously, Hildy, I have a hunch that I ran into an important clue last night. Otherwise, why would I have written a check? There's only one thing for me to do—get into the same condition I was last night, retrace my steps, and hope my memory will come back to me if I go through the same motions."

Despite Miss Withers' protests and Maggie's disapproval, Malone bowed, sprinkling cigar ashes all over his pea-green Sulka tie, and departed. "That *man!*" said Maggie.

"*Men!*" said Miss Withers. "Well, we must sit down and put our heads together. Let's start over. Malone wouldn't try to bribe that witness—but it would appear that somebody else did get to him. That somebody could be the real killer. Malone is no fool, and he believes his client innocent, doesn't he?"

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"He *always* believes them innocent!" Maggie admitted.

"But the police do make mistakes sometimes, especially when they have a too ready-made, too obvious suspect at hand. We must act on the presumption that the murder was committed by somebody else. Take that ex-husband of Jeanine's, for instance. Suppose he brooded over being discarded? His shipmates would have gladly lied for him to give him an alibi. He could have stolen Junior's car out of the garage, and if the key wasn't in it he could have hot-rodded the ignition—"

"You mean 'hot-wired' " corrected Maggie.

"And what about this Mrs. Frances Coleman? She could have decided to eliminate the only person standing in the way of a reconciliation with her husband."

"But she didn't even know Jeanine existed. Finch swore—"

"I wouldn't believe a private eye under oath—*any* private eye. Most of them are blackmailers at heart. Suppose he had been shaking down Junior or Jeanine or both, and they had threatened him with the loss of his license or with jail? His story about *never* getting the goods on Junior sounds weak to me." The schoolteacher looked considerably brighter. "So we have Frances, Zimmer, and Finch—three possible suspects. I'm going to circulate among them and act as a sort of catalytic agent, while Malone is out treading—rather,—retreading—the primrose path. My first call will be on Mr. Gerald Adams."

"You mean he's on your list of suspects too?" Maggie asked in surprise.

"At this point everyone is. But, Maggie, you've given me an idea. Suppose Gerald Adams himself has playboy tendencies, and has been financing his fun by dipping into the Coleman funds; and suppose Jeanine came to find out about it, and—"

"Take it easy!" cried Maggie. "When Mr. Coleman Senior died the estate naturally went into probate and everything was in good order. I know because Malone had the same idea at one time, and we checked."

"Too bad—it was a nice thought. But since Adams handled the defense at one time, and knows Junior well, he may have some ideas."

"He did phone Malone asking if there was anything he could do, but I think he felt he had to make the gesture. He didn't like being dropped from the case in favor of Malone. He sounded very conservative—sort of stuffy."

"I can deal with him then—some of my best friends are stuffed shirts."

The spinster schoolteacher picked up her handbag and umbrella, and metaphorically girding her loins for action, galloped off in all directions.

Meanwhile back at the ranch (Texas Slim's Ranch Bar and Grill, on Twenty-second Street) John J. Malone was vainly trying to re-

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create last night's roseate glow. He had started out as usual at the City Hall Bar, where Joe the Angel had let himself be fast-talked into a "quick fifty" for the evening's expenses. After that there had been Soapy Sullivan's Place, and Mike's Beer and Pizza Parlor, and the Grotto and—it all blended into a sort of photo-montage.

Now and then he got a clue as to his course the previous night from a bartender or a friendly taxi driver, but it was rough going. He knew he must be loaded to the Plimsoll mark and beyond, but the important part of last night's adventures were still shrouded in impenetrable fog. He really should eat something. "Bartender, will you put an olive in my next drink? Oh, make that a hardboiled egg, if you've got any."

"Specialty of the house. You got through half a dozen last night."

Malone took a big bite of egg, shell and all. "I really *was* in here? You're sure?"

"Don't you remember our five-man quartette and how good we got going on *The Rose of Tralee?*"

"Was I with anybody? Who were my friends?"

"Just about everybody in the place. But one of the guys singing with us was Luke Swenson, who runs the bowling alley down the street."

"Did I leave here with him?"

"No, not exactly. A big blonde dame come in to meet Luke, and you got talking to her and then I saw the two of you cut out . . ."

"Blondes I have always with me," confessed Malone. He slapped himself smartly on the side of the head. "If I could only remember—" He turned suddenly to the barman. "Mind joining me in a bar or two of a song—just to help me think?"

The customer, at Texas Slim's, is always right. The bartender took a deep breath and then came out with a baritone blast, above which Malone's tenor rose like a soaring bird. "The pale moon was shinin' above the green mountain, the sun was declinin' into the blue sea . . ."

"Blue sea!" cried Malone. "I told her her eyes were as blue as the sea! That was Luke Swenson's *sister*, Little Helga, a queen-size Viking goddess! I am in love with her, practically!"

It all came back to him—in a rush. The little lawyer was already at the phone, dialing with fingers suddenly steady again. "Hello, Maggie? You still there?"

"I figured somebody better be minding the store—"

"Maggie, it *worked!* I remember everything! Say, did I get any phone calls?"

"Yes, boss. Your *horse* called."

"That's Little Helga, my Norse goddess! Look, Maggie, she isn't a horse; she happens to be a teller in the South Side bank where Max Taras has his account! She recognized my name as the attorney of record in the Coleman trial, and one thing led to another—"

"How much did you write that

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check for, Malone?" she said ominously.

"I *didn't!* I tore the check out because it has my office address on it and I was out of business cards. She promised to look up something in the bank files for me and call me back."

"Well, she did. So you needn't have gone out and wasted all this time and money and got yourself in whatever condition you're in. Miss Swenson left her home number and said to call her."

"Fine, fine! Maggie, this case is going to blow wide open. Taras actually *was* bribed! Because he deposted one thousand dollars in his account the day after he crossed me up at the trial. And get this—it was a *thousand dollar bill!* That's just the sort of bait that would work with a simple jerk like him. But thousand dollar bills can be traced—banks keep records. I'll make that guy squirm!"

"Remember, he used to be a wrestler, so watch yourself."

"I will. Is Hildegarde still hanging around?"

"She phoned and said to tell you she'd had a very busy afternoon and that she'd checked into the YWCA."

"Well, it looks as if we won't need her help after all. You go home and get some sleep now—I've got another call to make." It *was* his night, after all. He dialed, and Little Helga, with a voice like hot buttered rum, answered the phone.

"Sure, sweetie, I got everyt'ing," she told him proudly. "Mister Taras' address and phone number right outa the files, like I promise. You gi'ng *keep* your promise, hah?" Malone could only gulp. "You promise to take me to dinner and dancing Saturday night, remember?"

"Wild horses couldn't keep me away! But first, where is Taras hiding out?"

She told him, and he memorized the address and phone number. But when she started on the serial number of the thousand dollar bill, he interrupted. "That's too long and complicated to get straight over the phone. Suppose I drop by and take you out for a nightcap?"

"I'm not dressed, I mean for *out.* But beer I got here—?"

"*Meeerow!*" said Malone. "I mean, okay, I'll be there."

He paused to straighten his tie, purchased a pint of Canadian because he only considered beer fit for chasers, and started toward a taxi. Then he got another idea. The situation called for psychological warfare. If he could make Max Taras sweat for an hour or two, the man would be ripe for cracking.

Malone phoned the number Helga had given him, and when a guttural voice answered, he snapped, "Max, this is Malone, the attorney. I'm coming down to see you in a little while and you better be there!"

"I got nuttin' to say to you! I don' vant—"

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"Shut up. You're going to tell me the name of the crook who gave you that grand note to double-cross me in court! And don't try to run—that would only be a confession!" There was a gobble of profanity, presumably in Czech, and Malone hung up, very pleased with himself.

Luckily he still had money enough for a taxi, because he was now on Cloud Nine and the El would have been beneath him. It was well worth it when Helga answered the door, wreathed in smiles and a frothy negligee. That blackout of his must have been the worst in medical history! To think that he could have forgotten, even for a few hours, a gorgeous female like this! Even without makeup, and with lashes and eyebrows as pale as her wheat-colored hair, she was a vision—suited to the wide screen.

"Come in, sweetie. But be quiet—mustn't wake Brunnehilde!"

Into each life some rain must fall, as the poetess said. Malone tiptoed in—the last thing in the world he wanted to do was to wake a roommate named Brunnehilde! It meant working under wraps, because his greatest asset had always been his golden voice, and it is hard to do justice to a fine Irish brogue in a whisper . . .

Far uptown Miss Hildegarde Withers was engaged in giving her hair its requisite hundred strokes before turning out the light. She found it conducive to sleep, and tonight she wanted to sleep—and to dream. Her dreams were always sensible, and sometimes enlightening. She was also thinking of Junior Coleman, who would be lying now in his cell in the death row at Stateside, staring up at the ever-burning light in the ceiling . . .

Sometime later, give or take half an hour, Malone found himself being kissed a warm good night at the door. It had not been an entirely wasted visit; he was full of coffee and smorgasbord, was comparatively sober, and he now had another firm ally. Helga had even become so caught up in the spirit of it all that she insisted on lending him the pistol she sometimes had to carry on bank errands. It might come in handy in a heart-to-heart talk with an ex-wrestler . . .

Speaking of wrestling, Malone had tried one last hold in the doorway, and in the scuffle they had finally awakened Brunnehilde. She came literally flying out of the bedroom, screaming protests, and had startled Malone out of a year's growth. Then she perched on Helga's shoulder.

Lovebirds were certainly misnamed, said the little lawyer as he went down the stairs. But he was all the more in the mood to face Taras. He managed to catch an owl trolley south, and finally came to an old brownstone apartment not far enough away from the Stockyards. It looked empty, and next on the list for condemnation, but this was the right number. There were no

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names on the mailboxes in the lobby.

Of course, by now Taras would be in a state of extreme jitters, and his apartment would be the one with the light under the door. Malone rapped at 2-B, rapped harder, and then tried the knob. The door swung slowly open, and he stepped belligerently into a tawdry living room.

Suddenly the taste of the imported perfecto in his mouth became bitter as ashes—for there was Max Taras' body lying on the twisted rug, eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling.

Malone swore softly. While he had been dallying with the fair Swenska-flicka, somebody else had beaten him to the all-important witness. Then all speculations as to who, when, and why were suddenly interrupted by a feeble moan from the corpse.

Taras wasn't dead! The little lawyer's first thought was to reach for the pint in his pocket, and then he remembered that liquor should never be forced on an unconscious man. He himself was not unconscious, though. The logical thing was to call an ambulance. Only he *had* to talk to Taras before anyone else did. Perhaps water—in two strides he was in the kitchen.

Then the roof fell in.

Eventually Malone came back to consciousness, and immediately wished he hadn't. There were no words to describe his headache. He managed to stand up, brushed automatically at the clothing, and then realized that perhaps he had missed an exit cue. He looked into the other room—Taras still lay there on the twisted rug.

But something new had been added. Now the ex-wrestler stared up at the ceiling with an extra eye in the middle of his forehead.

The little lawyer knew without even looking that the disaster would be complete. Yes, the little pistol was in his pocket, and it stank of raw cordite. He could hear voices on the stairs, and the distant wolf-wail of sirens coming closer. He ran back through the kitchen, caroming off table and stove, and threw open a back window. There had to be a fire escape! There was, but the upraised ladder was rusted tight.

He could think of only one thing to do—hang by his hands and drop into the dark; so drop he did. He landed heavily, and one leg turned beneath him with a white-hot stab of pain; then he blacked out. It was just as well—the ensuing formalities were such that he would have preferred to miss them anyway.

Meanwhile Miss Hildegarde Withers was also having her setbacks. First, she had barged into the law offices of Gittel and Adams, noting that the place appeared not to have been redecorated since the Big Fire, if then. The plumply pretty redhead at the reception desk was doing her face over at the moment of Hildegarde's arrival. She was sorry

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but Mr. Gerald Adams was busy; wouldn't Mr. Gittel or the elder Mr. Adams do?

The schoolteacher said she would wait. Then, one girl to another: "That lip rouge is *just* your shade. I've always wished *I* had red hair."

"You could, the same way I got mine." The name was Gertrude, and she had been here for years but was now looking for a more interesting job. No, the firm didn't do much trial work and rarely handled criminal cases. "Oh, there was one," Gertie added. "Mr. Gerald got Kirsch, the big-shot bookie, off on an assault charge last year; but the state's witnesses all disappeared, so we don't brag about that one."

"And there was the murder trial, of course. Were you in court?"

"We don't even talk about *that* one! Mr. Gerald tried so hard, too! Wasn't the verdict a shame?"

"A shame indeed, for others as well as Junior Coleman. By the way, one thing I came here to get is the address of Mrs. Frances Coleman."

"You're not another of those reporters?"

"Just an *amicus curiae*. The case is being reopened, which is why I want a talk with the lady."

Gertie hesitated, then grinned. "Funny your asking. Want to know where she is right this minute? In *there*, taking dictation from Mr. Gerald! Believe it or not, she's his new private secretary, which is one of the reasons I'm reading Help Wanted ads. When she came in I got fired."

"Oh, dear! No wonder you are somewhat put out."

"Huh? Oh, I didn't have any crush on him, if that's what you mean. Mr. Gerald is strictly business. I think he gave her the job because she needs it real bad. She doesn't get alimony any more, and all Junior ever had was the allowance his father had us pay him every week. I guess Mr. Gerald has a soft heart after all, or else he gets a kick out of having a former Junior Leaguer on the payroll and I'm sorry but we haven't any record of that—" Gertie's eyes flashed quick warning.

The door had opened and a tall, willowy, jet-haired girl was coming out, hands adjusting her striking hairdo. The eyes were blue-green with darkish shadows, the chin small but arrogant. "Coffee break, Gert," she said in passing.

"That means Frances is having a quick one at the bar downstairs," Gertie translated. "Can you blame her, under the circumstances? I'll find out if Mr. Gerald is free now."

Gerald Adams, rising politely from behind an oversize, immaculate desk, was a youngish man, medium Brooks Brothers in dress, medium handsome, with a medium voice, medium traces of Russian Leather lotion, and a rather tight mouth. Nevertheless, he could smile, and did. "Though I don't see what I can do," he said, after Miss Withers

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had introduced herself as a special representative of an imaginary Committee on Miscarriages of Justice. "It would be highly unethical for us to intervene when Walter Coleman, Junior has seen fit to retain other counsel."

"For which decision the young man is undoubtedly sorry. But I need your help. You *do* believe he's innocent, don't you?"

"What I personally believe is of no moment. Two juries—"

"As a trial lawyer you must know that juries do make mistakes."

Gerald Adams rose and stalked up and down the room. "I admit that Hamilton, the Deputy D.A., outfought me in court. Though at that I did better than my successor. But the circumstantial case against Junior was very strong. Still, this fellow Malone might have got him off scot-free if his trying to tamper with a witness hadn't backfired."

"Malone claims he didn't bribe Taras, that someone else did."

"Who else would have a reason? *Cui bono*, as we lawyers say."

" 'Who benefits.' And my question is, who really benefits here?"

"You mean by the death of Jeanine? Who but Junior Coleman, it would appear. He had become entangled with the girl, she was making excessive demands, and he wanted to end the affair."

"You are stating the prosecution's side. But couldn't someone else have wanted to end that love affair, even by drastic means?"

"If you are trying to involve Frances Coleman, the very idea is preposterous. I felt it my duty, while I was defense counsel, to look into the possibility of casting a reasonable doubt, and of directing suspicion at someone other than our client. But Frances is obviously in the clear. She was hoping to reestablish the marriage, and had hired that private detective just to see if Junior was telling the truth about having given up his wild ways. But remember, she didn't even know the identity of the girl, or if such a person existed!"

"But Junior did contemplate marrying Jeanine, didn't he?" It was a wild shot, but it hit home. Mr. Gerald sat down suddenly.

"Who told you that?" he demanded. "If there has been a leak in this office—"

"Please, this is no time to be stuffy—not when the man is to die in less than a week!"

Mr. Gerald frowned. "Well, it is a matter of record. Walter Junior tried to sound us out, in an interview about ten days before the murder, as to what we thought his father's reaction would be to his getting married as soon as his divorce from Frances was final. No names were mentioned, but we gathered that the lady was someone not *quite* a lady—definitely someone of whom the elder Mr. Coleman would not approve."

"Junior asked you that, in so many words?"

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"As a matter of fact, he spoke to my father."

"Why? Didn't you and Junior get on?"

Mr. Gerald sighed deeply. "Madam, it has been my unfortunate duty for some years to put the brakes on Junior Coleman, to thwart him when he wanted extra money for useless extravagances such as a new foreign sports car every year, and to get him eternally out of scrapes. I'm afraid he looks on me as a sort of combined governess and truant officer."

Miss Withers felt herself suddenly more in sympathy with this earnest young man. "If Junior's thoughts of matrimony had come out in court, it would have bolstered the prosecution's case, would it not? On the other hand, it might make it look worse for the former Mrs. Coleman, who wanted to get him back and would have perhaps gone to considerable lengths to do so—"

"I do *not* agree! Both parties swore that they became reconciled that night, which of course invalidated the interlocutory decree. Why would she feel it necessary to leave her newly returned husband and go out intent on murder? Besides, I have heard that when a person turns to murder, he uses the weapon with which he is most familiar. Women murderers lean toward the subtle way of poison, while murder by auto is, according to most authorities, a man's method."

"Or it could be chosen by a woman simply because it *is* a man's method. A smoke screen, a red herring—like the pipe and the beret."

Mr. Adams was amused. "I know Mrs. Coleman well enough to feel that she is utterly incapable of violence. And granted that she even knew of Jeanine's existence, why would Frances of all people try to put the blame on Junior, using his car, and so on? She would only be defeating her own ends."

"Too true." Miss Withers was nettled. "I've been grasping at straws. But in this case there are so few suspects to clutch at."

"You are telling me! I must confess I liked CPO Zimmer for a time. But he showed no evidence of being still in love with the girl, and how could he have got hold of Junior's car?"

"And what about that shady private detective, Mr. Finch?"

"A nasty type, but hardly courageous enough in my opinion to commit murder. Unless he is deeper than he seems—"

"Aren't we all? You yourself, Mr. Adams—aren't you whitewashing Frances because she is a very attractive woman? Haven't you even taken her in and given her a job?"

The man picked up a heavy ashtray, and for a moment Miss Withers thought he was going to brain her with it. But he only surveyed its contents thoughtfully and then emptied it into the wastebasket. "That must not get out to the

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newspapers," he said, "or the sob sisters will start making her life miserable again. We'll deny it."

"Not to me. I just saw her here."

Mr. Gerald managed to look both belligerant and sheepish. "I—we had our reasons. Even though she has no claim against the estate, it wouldn't look well to have her slinging hash or working as a saleslady."

"Speaking of the estate, which I understand Junior cannot inherit while he is under sentence of death, who *does* come into the money now?"

Mr. Gerald seemed much happier with the change of subject. "I cannot be sure. There are supposed to be some distant cousins in East Germany, but it will probably take years before they can be located and their claims validated." His expression indicated that any claim would take a great deal of proving before Gittel and Adams relinquished a red cent.

"If by some miracle Junior got a commutation of sentence and could then inherit, would your firm continue to handle the estate for him?"

"I should think so. I doubt if he could manage it from a prison cell. The administration of an estate like that is a vast responsibility. Of course, he could choose some other firm—"

He was looking at his watch, and Miss Withers hastily rose, thanking him and promising to get in touch if there was anything at all he could do—which bit of one-upmanship left the gentleman looking just a little bewildered. As she left the suite, not without a smile and a nod to Gertrude—a very useful contact—the schoolteacher had much to contemplate. It was late in the day to come up with anything new on the case. But most murders, she knew, were attempted for gain. And so far nobody seemed to be thinking about the Coleman money.

As she went out through the lower hall she turned on impulse into a dim and aromatic cave, under a sign reading *Cocktails*. Customers were few, but Frances Coleman was perched on a bar stool. Her dark head was keeping time to the beat of a juke box, which was playing something soft and miserable as a wet kitten.

Miss Withers ordered lemonade, then slid over beside her quarry. "Excuse me—they said I'd find you here. I've just been talking to Gerald Adams," she whispered meaningfully. Frances turned slowly, like a mechanical doll, her face blank. But at least she didn't jump up and leave. "I'm a sort of citizen's committee of one, trying to work with Mr. Malone to save your ex-husband's life."

"Why?" said the dark girl.

"I've been called a champion of lost causes, a tilter at windmills, and a meddlesome old snoop. But I do need your help."

"There's nothing to be done." The enunciation was painful.

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"But surely you of all people know he's innocent! Why aren't you down at Springfield, hammering on the Governor's door? If Junior never left your side that night—?"

Frances stared into her glass. "Yes," she said slowly. "I testified to that, didn't I? But Walter had had years of practice in deceiving me. We'd had a good deal to drink that night—I guess he *could* have waited until I was asleep and sneaked out and— She was after money, of course, whatever he had or would get. Not that that's any excuse. Now, if you don't mind—"

"But I do mind! Even Gerald Adams is giving me more cooperation than you are. *He* hasn't washed his hands of the case."

"Is that what you think?" Frances walked over to the juke box, balancing very carefully, to put in more coins. "Love that number," she explained on her return. "Dave Brubeck's *Gloomy Sunday*—it's my mood music."

"But you were saying—?"

"I don't remember what I was saying. I don't want to talk about it." Frances shoved her empty glass toward the bartender.

"Mr. Adams seems to agree with me that there are reasons for suspecting this Finch, who may be deeper than he seems."

"*That* nasty little man? I hired him long distance, and have seen him only once. He'd do anything for money—anything."

"But he could have found out more than he reported to you, and tried to use the information for his own purposes?"

"You really are tilting at windmills! I'm surprised you don't try to make out a case against *me*—or are you?"

Miss Withers let that one go by. "When are you going down to see Junior for the last time, Mrs. Coleman?"

"I'm not. I don't owe him any more favors. It's none of your damn business, but Walter sent word he didn't want to see me. It would just break us both up, and for what? I can't help him—nobody can. Not any more."

"But you realize that if we found new evidence, there might be a commutation of his sentence?"

"And Junior, even in prison, would inherit the family money and I'd be a wealthy woman. Is that what you're thinking? But I'm talking too much, and I wish you'd go away. I'm going to get stoned and stay stoned until it's all over."

"That's a *defeatist* attitude! If you love Junior and really want to save him, would you consent to take the lie detector test you refused?"

That struck deep. "You want to know why I couldn't? Because if you must know, I *wasn't* with him that night, not after midnight! We had dinner and we also had a row because I can't stand him when he gets a weeping jag on. He called me a couple of days later and begged me

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to give him an alibi, but for all I know he *did* kill that girl!"

She turned and ran unsteadily out of the bar.

"Sometimes I should let well enough alone," said Miss Withers as she found she was stuck for the check.

"Lie still, Malone, and smell the pretty flowers!" came an all-too-familiar voice. The little lawyer blinked the one bleary eye that showed through the bandages; he knew vaguely that he was in a private room in Cook County Hospital with one leg raised high in traction, that he had no interest in any flowers except perhaps Four Roses, and—hadn't that been a stiff-starched nurse who just tiptoed across his line of vision?

"Friend or enema?" he demanded cautiously.

"Be serious," said Miss Hildegarde Withers. "And keep your voice down—there's a policeman stationed outside the door. I had to talk to you, though you're not allowed visitors, so I borrowed the plumage from a friend of Maggie's and am to all intents and purposes a head nurse. Now for heaven's sake what happened to you last night?"

"It's not as bad as it looks," he confessed. "It's worse." Then he told her all. "Taras must have panicked when I phoned him, and called somebody for instructions. Only this somebody didn't bother to bribe him again, but decided to drop by and silence him for good. I intruded in the midst of it, and got set up as the patsy. The gun is easily traceable to me, and from the official point of view I had plenty of motive. If I were acting as my own attorney, I'd advise me to cop a plea!"

"Nonsense! *We* know you didn't kill Taras. There *must* be a connection between the two murders. Somebody killed Jeanine and framed Junior for it, and the same somebody must have killed Taras and framed you for it. If we can only prove it—"

"Yes, and if we had some tonic we'd have some gin-and-tonic if we had some gin," he said morosely.

"But, Malone, I *am* getting somewhere even if I don't know just where!"

She told him about her visit to the offices of Gittel and Adams, and of the admission she had got from Frances Coleman.

"But there goes the last shred of my client's alibi!" Malone complained. "You're doing fine, just fine—running toward the wrong goalposts!"

"The truth must out. This development doesn't make Junior look any worse than he did—nothing could. He didn't ask Frances for the alibi until days after the murder. And you can't tell me that an inebriated man would think of putting a lap robe over the front of his car. I have a lot of unanswered questions, Malone—"

"Such as, why didn't you stay

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home with your African violets?"

"No. For example, why does she say she'd be a rich woman if Junior got a commutation to life imprisonment?"

"I can answer that. If they both swear they spent the night together, the interlocutory divorce is null and void and they are husband and wife. It doesn't matter to the law if they actually did, or not."

"Interesting, but not immediately pertinent. Right now my feminine intuition tells me—" She broke off as she saw his face. "Don't sneer. Intuition means being able to come to the right conclusion without going through all the steps between. Malone, I let it drop in several places that the case is being reopened. That should make the murderer nervous, to say the least. Whoever it is, I am going to put the fear of God into Finch, into that sailor at Great Lakes who was once Jeanine's husband if I can get in there—"

"'And although she's barred, from the Navee Yard—'" sang Malone softly. "Hildegarde, what good do you think all this is going to do?"

She surveyed him coldly. "You know, Malone, I think there was a mirror over the sink in the Taras kitchen, and you caught a glimpse of the person who slugged you. Or you caught a whiff of something—strong tobacco or shaving lotion or expensive perfume—"

"There wasn't, and I didn't. And it was no lady who whammed me!"

"You can't be sure—a sandbag is a sandbag. And I didn't mean all this actually *happened*—you could just hint at it and it might flush the killer out of hiding. Say, a press release—?"

"So that Mr. X will sneak in here and eliminate me while I'm a sitting duck on a pond! No, I'm putting my faith in something more sensible. If I could only get to my clothes, I've got the serial number of that thousand dollar bill Taras was bribed with. That can be traced."

"Maggie and I have already been in touch with Miss Swenson, and we have the number. Maggie has been checking with local banks all morning, but no luck so far. Unfortunately, everyone agrees that it will take weeks—"

"And meanwhile my client gets executed and I get indicted—not just for subornation, but for the murder of Taras! Please go away."

"You concentrate on getting well. Leave everything to me and Maggie and Miss Swenson, who I think has honorable intentions. I must be off—I hear the rattle of lunch trays in the hall."

"Wait! As head nurse, you could maybe find where they keep the *spiritus frumenti?* Or maybe just a tot of pure alcohol for what ails me?"

"As far as I am concerned, you are on a cold turkey diet," the schoolteacher said firmly, and was gone.

It turned out to be just in the nick of time, for on the way down the corridor she passed Captain von

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Flanagan and his two aides, who looked very grim but who luckily did not look at her. They were headed for Malone's room, and she would dearly have loved to listen at the door. But for once she decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

Back at the office Maggie greeted her with a barrage of questions. "He'll live," the schoolma'am told her. "Just suffering acutely from withdrawal symptoms."

"The poor man! He'll only be needing a small pint to quiet his nerves, and believe it or not he always thinks more clearly when he has a wee drop in him."

"Now don't go soft on him—or on me!" said Miss Withers. "That man is just aching to be reformed. Any phone calls?"

"Just the reporters, who've caught on that something is up."

"That gives me an idea. Are any of them friendly?"

"Most of 'em. You should see our Christmas list!"

"Well, see if they will run the number of that thousand dollar bill. *Alerting all bank personnel*—that sort of thing. It would be far quicker than phoning one bank after another."

"Okay. Oh, yes, there was one other call. It was Mr. Finch—did you know his first name is Boris?—and he insisted that he had to get in touch with Malone."

"Aha! My plot is working. Where's his office?"

The sign on the door read *Finch and Associates*, but the moment Miss Withers entered she realized it was strictly a one-man operation. Mr. Boris Finch himself was busy on the phone in the inner office; she could hear enough of the one-sided conversation by putting her ear to the door panel to gather that he was stalling somebody about money.

The schoolteacher was just getting interested in a last month's copy of *Time* when Finch poked his head out and said cautiously, "Yes?" He was a small man somewhat gone to fat, somewhere in his fifties and past whatever prime he might have had. If he had shaved that morning it had been with a dull blade.

She introduced herself as "Miss Withers, Mr. Malone's associate," and went on, "Poor Malone happens to be incommunicado in County Hospital, but if anything important is on your mind I thought you could talk to me, as his partner."

Finch blinked. "John J. Malone has a lady partner? Well, I'll be—"

"I don't practice in this state," she said truthfully. "But sometimes I'm called in as a consultant on complicated cases, such as this Coleman affair seems to be. It's reopened, you know."

The man nodded, then led her into his private office, which was furnished with a minimum of battered essentials plus a couch with the appearance of having been slept in often and recently, a hot plate, and a large bookcase filled with old

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*Holiday* and *National Geographic* magazines and worn paperback whodunits. He saw her glance at the latter. "Oh, them. You know, I get a lot of good ideas outa them—to use in my work."

"I can imagine," said Miss Withers as she sat down gingerly on the couch.

"You say you're *really* in Malone's confidence?" the man demanded. "You got the power to speak for him?"

"Absolutely. Check with his secretary, Miss Maggie O'Leary, and she'll tell you that I've been associated with him on several very successful cases in the past."

Finch immediately took her at her word, picked up the phone, and dialed. Whatever Maggie said, he seemed to be satisfied. But he went out and locked the front door, very carefully.

"Now I'll get down to cases," he said. "You and I both know Malone is in the biggest jam of his life. He's got two charges against him and he's gonna lose a client and get no fee. So wouldn't it be worth five grand to him to get out of it, free and clear? Has he got that kind of money, or could he get it from the Coleman estate or anywhere?"

Miss Withers hesitated, thinking of her own modest savings, and of how much she could borrow on her cottage in Santa Monica. "Possibly," she conceded. "But I'm not buying any pig in a poke. What's it all about?"

"Let me take a look in your handbag," he said slyly.

"What? Surely you don't think I have that much with me?"

"I just wanta make sure you haven't got a tape recorder going," he told her. "Because while I don't mind saying certain things to you, I might wanta deny 'em later."

The schoolteacher, somewhat amused, proved to his satisfaction that she was not wired for sound, and he relaxed.

"Okay, lady, here's the deal. It takes Malone off the hook three ways. Now on payment to me of five thousand bucks, in tens and twenties, I make a deposition, see? I swear that while I was shadowing Junior Coleman I *did* succeed in getting the goods on him and the Jeanine girl, and I *did* report it to my client, Mrs. Frances Coleman."

"Then you lied to the police, and under oath in court?"

"I was just protecting the interests of my client. She paid me some, and she was going to pay me more. But that ain't the point. I offer to make a deposition that I was still shadowing Junior the night of the murder, working on my own because I had a hunch. I was staked out near his apartment, and I saw Frances Coleman come in with him about one and I saw her go out about two thirty *in his car!*"

"*Mister* Finch!" gasped the schoolteacher. "You kept silent—?"

"I had reasons. Maybe I was thinking that when she got her

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hands on some of the Coleman fortune she'd like to take care of me. After I told her the favor I'd done her. But I've thought it over, and my conscience is bothering me, see? So now I can't keep silent while an innocent man is going to be executed, can I? It makes sense, lady. She's testified that Junior was sleeping beside her at the time of the murder, and the D.A. suggested that he could have got up and gone out and done the killing without her knowing. But it could have worked out just as well *the other way around!*"

Miss Withers did not bat an eyelash. "Do you think your word, or even your deposition, would carry any weight under the circumstances?"

"Try it and see! The newspapers will do plenty with it. Frances Coleman had an even better motive to kill Jeanine than Junior did. As for the Taras murder, the man used to be a wrestler, and he was on his guard. Who else but a luscious dame could get close enough to sap him? She must have bribed Taras originally for fear he would tell the truth about his phony identification of Junior as driver of the death car, which might have won Junior an acquittal and put the heat on her as the next likely suspect! Digging up the money to bribe Taras must have taken her last thousand bucks, which is why she's now broke and working as a secretary—"

"My goodness gracious!" whispered Miss Withers. "Why, this is the answer to everything, all neatly tied up in a parcel."

"Is it worth five grand, or isn't it? I want just enough to get me down to one of the banana republics, where there's no extradition and where I'll be out of this whole mess."

"But your deposition wouldn't stand up, if you're away—"

"Who said it would have to stand up in court? It would be enough to hit all the papers, and force the Governor's hand so he'll *have* to grant a stay of execution. This would take the heat off Junior and off Malone, because it would cast the finger of suspicion at somebody else. Is it a deal?"

For almost the first time in her long and stormy career Miss Hildegarde Withers was at a loss for words. All this—after what Frances had let slip? Of course she could have been lying, or this man could be lying, or *everybody* could be lying!

As Hildegarde hesitated, Finch threw in the clincher. "Tell you what I'm gonna do! In my deposition I'll add just one more thing. Taras fell for a bribe of a thousand dollar bill, right? Malone is having it traced through the banks, because bills of that denomination are used only in transactions between Federal Reserve banks. With one exception—that's the underworld, the Syndicate boys and such. Okay, I'll swear that I got that grand note for Frances from one of the surviving members of the Hook gang out in

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Cicero! You can get anything in Cicero if you got connections. Same place I'll swear—I got—the chloral hydrate for her, the Mickey Finn she slipped Junior that night so he wouldn't wake up while she was out on a murder romp in his car! How's about it, sister?"

"I'm thinking," she said. The trouble was, she wasn't at all sure that Malone wouldn't be tempted to go for it, hook, line, and sinker. "Just how much truth is there in the story?" she asked quietly.

"Never mind. But it'll serve its purpose. We got a deal?"

"I—I'll have to speak to Malone," she parried. "When he regains consciousness, of course." And she made a hasty exit.

She stopped off in her room at the YWCA to soak for a few minutes in a hot tub with plenty of soap, and then went on to Malone's office where she unburdened herself to the faithful Maggie.

"Sure it would work," said Maggie. "It would make Frances Coleman sweat for a while, but I doubt if it would really stick—and even if it did, with her looks she'd probably get off. Malone says that people always believe a man when he slings mud that also gets all over himself. People like to believe the worst."

"You think I should tempt Malone with the offer?"

"Huh? Oh, you're afraid he'll want to go for it. You don't know the man like I do. But he ought to know what's up. The story fits the known facts so well, it's a shame that nasty man made it all up!"

"Did he? I mean, is it? Maggie, a lot of things in this crazy, mixed-up world are a shame, 'O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right.' —Hamlet."

"You'd better have a nice cup of coffee."

"No time, Maggie. You know, it occurs to me that the name of Cicero has been cropping up in this case a good deal."

"It's a real tough suburb, out southwest. You're not *going* there?"

"Not yet. I've been thinking in other directions, Maggie. I have one more interview coming up. In the first ones, Frances managed to implicate Junior even deeper, and Finch offered to pin the whole thing on Frances—I wonder what's next? How does one go about getting into the Navy Yard—I mean the Great Lakes Naval Training Station? Or at least getting in touch with a sailor there?"

"Ten years ago I could have found out easy," sighed Maggie. "But the bluejackets haven't been whistling at me lately."

"Well, be glad you have memories! Let's try the telephone."

They managed to leave a message for CPO Zimmer to call back, and call back he did. He even consented to an interview that very evening, since he had shore leave, and would meet the schoolteacher in any convenient bar-and-grill if she would pick up the check.

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"And where else but Joe the Angel's?" suggested Maggie from the sidelines. "You can sign the tab."

CPO Zimmer was, at the beginning, something of a disappointment. He turned out to be a solid, earthy, red-faced man in civilian clothes. Somehow Miss Withers had expected a real salty Jack Tar with a multitude of hash marks and a tattoo on his wrist. Nor was he overly cooperative, even after she had bought him three beers and a T-bone steak.

"I thought when you said it had to do with Jeanine it was something about that jewelry and clothes and furniture of hers," he said.

"But if you were divorced, how could you expect to inherit?"

"Who else has a better right? She just mentioned a Mexican divorce in one of her post cards, but I never got served with any papers. And she went right on drawing my allotment, even for a year after that."

"Which all added up to making you naturally resentful, yes?"

He drew back. "Oh, it was just one of those things. Dames are dames. That Jeanine could spend more than any five men could earn. Always said she was going to marry a millionaire, and poor kid, I guess she pretty near made it."

"When you were transferred to duty near here you never even wrote to Jeanine, or went to see her act at the Le Jazz Hot Club?"

"Naw. She'd quit writing me. And those night clubs are all clip joints. She didn't want to see me, she'da had the bouncer throw me out."

"But the night she was killed you were supposed to be raising the roof with a group of your shipmates out in darkest Cicero?"

He blushed. "Lady, that was no night club. It—it was Jenny's Place. Jenny would alibi me."

"I see," said Miss Withers coldly. "But you do have contacts out in Cicero, then. I've heard it's a place where you can pick up anything—such as a thousand dollar bill that can't be traced through the banks, or even a neat little packet of knock-out drops? If I were to ask you, you'd know right where to lay your hands on something like that, wouldn't you?"

Zimmer rose suddenly to his feet, grabbed his hat, and backed away. "Lady, you're nuts!" he cried, and rushed off.

"Well, you can't win 'em all," Maggie comforted Hildegarde over the phone.

"As I said to Malone yesterday—or was it only yesterday? My immediate worry is what I'm going to say to him tomorrow, poor man."

"You'll think of something," Maggie told her. "Sleep on it."

Which was easier said than done. The schoolteacher gave her hair its requisite hundred strokes with a brush, tried vainly to seek what she would have called the Arms of Morpheus, and finally turned on the

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light and tried to work a double-crostic puzzle in the current *Saturday Review*, coming out second-best. Finally she must have slept, though all she could remember of her dreams was that they were nightmares . . .

With mixed emotions Miss Withers again assumed the costume of a head nurse the next morning—and found when she reached the hospital it hadn't been exactly necessary. There was no uniformed officer outside Malone's door.

"But the heat is still on," the little lawyer told her. "I guess the police just figured out finally that a man with a leg raised in traction isn't going anywhere. Did you maybe bring me a pint or anything?"

"I brought you something much more interesting," she said. And she told him of the surprising offer from Mr. Finch. Malone's one good eye brightened through the bandages.

"Holy St. Paul and Minneapolis! If it was only *true!* Of course we wouldn't go for it even if I had the dough, but he might make a deal with the newspapers if he thinks of peddling his information there."

"I imagine they'd be afraid of the laws of libel."

"You could be right. Nothing new on that thousand dollar bill?"

"No. And it's Saturday, so the banks will be closed today and tomorrow. We have so little time! The only real hope we have is that the murderer will believe you are actually unconscious here in the hospital, and that he will make a desperate attempt to silence you before you miraculously regain your wits and can talk—"

"Now *wait—a—minute!*"

"We should have the cooperation of the hospital authorities, and of the police, of course. You could be removed to some other room, if you're nervous. We could have a dummy, or a policeman, in your bed."

"Is there a difference?" He grinned. "No, I wouldn't miss it for the world. Hildegarde, I have a confession to make. This traction thing is a phony. The doctor on ambulance was a fellow for whom I'd once done a favor; he brought me here and fixed me up this way so I wouldn't have to go to the jail hospital. All I got is a bad sprain." He swung his legs over the side of the bed, and tottered to his feet.

"Malone! When I think of all the sympathy I've wasted!"

"You would have given the gag away if you'd been in on it."

Her sniff was devastating. "Well then, you are mobile and even ambulatory, so that makes it easier. I suggest that you carry on as usual today, and then tonight we'll set the trap. This hospital is so big and overcrowded that practically anybody can come and go as he pleases, and the killer won't have the slightest difficulty—"

"It is my private opinion that

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you are nuttier than a fruit cake."

She bridled. "That is the *second* time in the last few hours I've been accused of mental aberration, and I don't like it. My plan is perfectly sound—it worked perfectly some years ago when dear Inspector Piper got knocked on the head, in the Blackboard murders. I'm sure that under the circumstances Captain von Flanagan will cooperate—"

"He will, will he?" roared that irate policeman, bursting in at precisely the wrong moment. He looked at Malone, who was now hastily burrowing back under the covers. He looked at Miss Withers in her borrowed white uniform. "So *both* of you are as phony as three-dollar bills. I should of knowed it! Okay, counselor, you're going over to the jail hospital—"

"Wouldn't tomorrow do just as well?" put in Miss Withers hopefully. "Malone can explain everything."

"Well, lady, *you* better explain this supposed leak from my office that went to the newspapers—about how when he recovers from surgery John J. Malone is expected to be able to put the finger on his assailant and break the Coleman case. One of the city editors checked back on it—and I got a good idea where it started. There's a law against impersonatin' an officer!"

"Which you've been doing for years," said Malone irreverently.

The Homicide Captain's face got redder than ever, but Miss Withers stepped quickly between them. "Captain, I didn't actually take your name in vain. And if you'll listen I can explain—"

"That's just dandy! You'll do all your explainin' downtown." He gripped her elbow and propelled her toward the door.

"Plead the Fifth Amendment!" Malone shouted helpfully after her.

But she soon found herself in a small Interrogation Room in the Detective Bureau, facing von Flanagan and a policeman with a stenotype. She was on a hard chair under a bright light, but was relieved to see that no rubber hoses were in evidence. "Now talk!" barked von Flanagan.

Which was his first mistake. It was the opportunity of a lifetime for the spinster schoolma'am, and she made the most of it. Now and again he tried to interrupt and get it in the form of questions and answers; but Miss Withers had a way of answering her own questions and questioning her own answers. Both von Flanagan and the stenographer were worn out before Hildegarde showed any signs of running down.

". . . and the main trouble is that both you and the District Attorney's office were so sure from the beginning you had the right man that you never looked anywhere else! Everybody mixed up in this case is lying—including Junior Coleman, but he shouldn't be executed for that, or for being a useless parasite on society either. The Taras

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murder proves that the killer is still at large. Even you, Captain, cannot believe that Malone would shoot anybody in cold blood—"

"Well, he had motive and he came there with a gun! Taras was going to be a witness against him at the subornation hearing—" He broke off. "Hey, I'm supposed to be *asking* the questions!"

"You do have a conscience! You'll be asking yourself one question for the rest of your life, if you stand by and permit this miscarriage of justice. Sooner or later that thousand dollar bill *will* be traced. If Malone had used it to tempt Taras, would he now be moving heaven and earth to prove it on himself? The D.A. has had it in for Malone these many years, but surely you yourself—"

"Harbin Hamilton don't like nobody. He outranks me. The case is outa my hands."

Miss Withers explained at some length how he could get it back into his hands. "Just consent to leave Malone where he is until tomorrow, and have a couple of your men hidden nearby."

"I can't. I been told to lay off. The moment I start assigning men the word gets around to Hamilton's office."

"Then can't you further the cause of justice by simply not interfering? The killer is as jittery now as a cat on a hot tin roof . . ."

Von Flanagan gave her an odd look. "You got an idea who it is?"

"Of course I have an idea. But I'm tired of having it suggested that I have lost all my marbles. The criminal has to expose himself! It came to me this morning, when I picked up a magazine puzzle that stumped me last night—"

"I got puzzles enough here on the job." Von Flanagan forgot why they were originally here—at least, to the point of sending out for coffee.

"Your bark is worse than your bite. Captain, I'm only in this case because I hate injustice. I hate to think of a murderer going around laughing at us!"

"What d'you mean '*us*'?"

"Everybody who's on the side of law and order. You can't tell me you're really satisfied with the Coleman case? So please don't move Malone, and please phone the papers to use that story."

Von Flanagan chewed on his unlighted cigar. "Okay," he said. "I can't put guards in the hospital, because I'd be criticized for making a stakeout that might endanger other patients with possibly some wild shooting and all. But the story can run, only I'll put a tail on every single suspect in this case tonight, so that if one of them even heads in the direction of County Hospital with a bomb or a gat or a shiv on him, we'll nab him *before* it can happen!"

"Thank you," said Miss Withers, grateful for all favors. In spite of what von Flanagan had said, she herself was going to be hidden in

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that hospital room. She knew from experience how easily a suspect could slip a tail, especially if he knew he was being followed—as easy as it would be for anyone to walk unnoticed into the hospital at any hour of the day or night, if he simply walked straight ahead and seemed to be there on legitimate business.

And megalomania—the delusion of being smarter and more powerful than anybody else—was at the core of every murderer's psyche . . .

"Of course you'll come along with me tonight," the schoolteacher told Maggie as the two of them lingered over dinner at Joe the Angel's, each of them fortified by a small glass of sherry. "Two heads are better than one, I always say."

"To be shot at, maybe," said Maggie, and ordered another sherry.

"If I can masquerade as a head nurse, you can be a nurse's aide. The hospital is so overcrowded and so busy that anything goes."

"The things I do for $80 a week—when I get it!" said Maggie.

So it was that late in the evening the two devoted admirers and co-conspirators converged on the hospital room of John J. Malone, well after visiting hours were over. They waited until they had seen the floor nurses finish their midnight rounds, and then came up the back stairs. Luckily Malone's room was not in direct view of the main desk.

He greeted them tenderly, too tenderly. In fact, he was mellow. "Malone, how *could* you, at a time like this?" cried Miss Withers.

"How?—as the Indian chief said to the mermaid. Well, if you must know, there's a disreputable old bum allowed to come through with his cart, selling newspapers and candy. He seems to have a side line, so I traded him my gold-plated cigar lighter for a much-needed pint."

"Where have you hidden the nasty stuff?" demanded Hildegarde.

But Malone refused to answer on the grounds that it might tend to incriminate him. So the two women searched—in the bed, under the mattress, everywhere. While they were looking in the closet and bathroom, Malone yawned copiously, reached over to the vase on the bedside table, lifted out the flowers, and took a purely medicinal dose—which would have been better without the weedy taste of the plant stems, but you can't have everything.

Maggie finally found the empty bottle in the waste basket, and they gave up.

"And this is one time I wanted you to be on your toes!" Miss Withers said.

"Name's Malone, not Nijinsky! But don't worry. I'll rise magnificently to the occasion, if there is one. Wish I knew who we're supposed to be expecting."

"Whom," corrected the schoolteacher automatically. "I think I

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know, but you'll only accuse me again of having lost my wits. The answer, if it is an answer, came to me while I was working a double-crostic in the current *Saturday Review*."

"Crossword puzzle stuff?" Malone yawned again.

"Infinitely more complicated. There's a list of definitions, and you have to guess the right word or phrase—such as that 'Jam today' is the one thing Alice in Wonderland couldn't have. The individual letters go on the proper squares, and after you have made a dozen guesses or so on the definitions, you've got bits and pieces of the main puzzle, which is supposed to be an author's name and a quote. But at this point it seems to be hopeless, and you drop it—"

"A good idea. Let's recite classic limericks. I have to do something to keep awake; the sleeping pill the nurse gave me is taking effect."

"Listen, this is fascinating. Sometimes when you come back to the puzzle and take a fresh look at it, you suddenly see the whole pattern; the missing letters fall into place and make words, and the words make phrases. That happened this morning. And then I realized that the same technique applies in solving a mystery. I realized that the key word in our present puzzle is M-O-N-E-Y—"

"Money's root . . . all evil," said Malone helpfully.

"The correct quotation is *Love* of money, and so forth. But come, we have preparations to make . . ."

In a matter of minutes the trap was set. Malone was under the bed on a blanket, with sheets arranged down the sides of the bed to hide him. Extra bedding and Miss Withers' raincoat suggested a sleeping form in the bed. The room was dark, except for what glow came through the hall door, slightly ajar.

Maggie was stationed in the bathroom, and Miss Withers in the closet. The schoolteacher was very hopeful. Somewhat unjustifiably hopeful, because—as she was soon to realize—she had failed to remember Malone's First Law, which is that "If Anything Can Possibly Go Wrong, It Will!"

The minutes passed, and the hours. Apart from the lawyer's snores from his lair beneath the bed, the vast hospital was silent as a tomb. It had other attributes of a tomb, too—including a pervading chill.

"The watched pot never boils," said Miss Withers to herself. "They also serve who only stand and wait. But they get cramps doing it."

There was the hint of gray dawn in the sky when they gave it up as a bad job. Miss Withers found Maggie asleep on the seat with her head and arms in the washbasin. "*Don't* say 'I told you so'," warned the schoolteacher. "Leave that for Malone."

But the little man had nothing to say when the two women got him semi-awake and back up into his

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bed again; his snoring hardly missed a beat.

"He's passed out and happy," said Maggie. "Let's go!"

"Good night, Malone," said Miss Withers to the recumbent form. "Relax, nobody walked into the trap—"

She started out, then stopped.

"*But somebody did!*" she wailed.

A wave of terror engulfed her—because there was no single pint ever distilled that would make John J. Malone pass out!

In a second the lights were on, and she was forcing his eyes open, staring at the pupils.

"Maggie, go get the nurse. A doctor! He's been poisoned!"

Maggie didn't go, but she stood still and screamed like a banshee, which served. All hell broke loose.

"Well," said a philosophic young resident, after the stomach pump had done its job, "if he had to take seconal enough to kill a horse, he picked a handy place. Barbiturates mixed with alcohol are triple deadly, but if we can keep him awake and walking and full of coffee he's got a fifty-fifty chance."

Von Flanagan had shouldered his way into the picture by this time, and was very disgusted. This never had made any sense to him.

"Oh, be *quiet!*" cried Miss Withers, beside herself. "I'm thinking! Malone said he got the whiskey from the old man who comes through the halls selling candy and newspapers."

Which was all very well, only it turned out that there wasn't anybody of that description peddling papers and candy through the hospital—not last night or any other time. Except perhaps in this one room . . .

"If you ask me—" began von Flanagan.

"*Shut up*, please!" blazed the furious schoolma'am. "Captain, I feel a streak of homicidal mania coming on. Lend me your gun, I want to go out and kill somebody. Or if you'll come along, perhaps you can prevent actual bloodshed!" She whispered something in his ear.

"But—but I can't do that without a warrant!"

"Can't you get one, if I swear out a complaint? Only, of course, all the evidence will be destroyed by then. Captain, we *must* act now!"

There was something compelling, something hypnotic, in her intensity.

"We'll skip the warrant," he decided. "I'm only going along to keep you from committing felonious assault, anyways."

So it was that Miss Withers and the Captain went tearing across the sleeping city with sirens screeching. Never before in Chicago's history had so many thousands of irate citizens been rudely awakened at that ungodly hour of a Sabbath dawn. But the most surprised and indignant of all was their quarry, who finally came down, half dressed, to answer the doorbell.

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"This is a citizen's arrest," said Miss Withers very formally. "Gerald Adams, I arrest you for the murder of John J. Malone."

The man only stared at them blankly. "I guess it's the law," began von Flanagan apologetically. "Under certain circumstances . . ."

But the bright young attorney wasn't pleading the law, which both visitors knew was technically on his side. He was trying to slam the door in their faces, which from von Flanagan's point of view was an error. Mr. Gerald was collared before he could lock himself in the bathroom.

The search that followed was unsuccessful—there were no traces of a false beard, stage makeup or spirit gum, or a bum's clothes. All that evidence had been disposed of.

But none of it was needed—for Gerald Adams had John J. Malone's gold-plated cigar lighter in his pocket.

It was sometime later, and the two oddly assorted partners-in-crime-and-detection were having dinner at Henrici's. Malone, still looking pale and wan, had even refused to look at the wine card, being very much on the wagon—for the time being at least. But he, and Miss Withers too, were making up for it with the vichysoisse and pheasant under glass and fresh asparagus hollandaise.

"It is rather a shame you missed the final scene," she told him.

"I was damn near having a final scene, all alone," he reminded her. "Anyway, you did fine. I can still boast that I've never lost a client yet, and this time I have a client who can and will pay."

"It was the money, of course," Miss Withers was saying. "A sort of love story—the love of Gerald Adams for the five million dollar estate."

"I stopped suspecting him for the same reasons you did—when I found that nobody had been dipping into the till . . ." Malone sighed.

"But neither of us realized that just the *management* of that much money would bring in $35,000 or more a year to the firm of Gittel and Adams! Gerald couldn't stand to have the firm lose that revenue, which it was bound to do if Junior inherited. More than that, he couldn't stand to think of Junior wasting all that money on women and liquor!"

"I wouldn't call it exactly *wasting*," said Malone with a touch of his old fire.

"Gerald knew that the old man was about to die, so he killed Jeanine and effectively pinned the crime on Junior. Junior was his intended victim from the beginning, but he could be taken care of this safe way—who would suspect Gerald Adams of the murder of a girl he had never even met, and who would suspect the lawyer for the accused, the apparent murderer's own attorney? But the net result was that the

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estate would be in the firm's hands forever!"

"Sure," said Malone. "It's all clear now. Gerald knew where the car was kept, and since he handled the purchase of such major extravagances he could easily get a key. All he wanted was Junior safe in prison and the precious estate in his own hands. When it looked as if I would expose Taras as having been overpressured into the identification of Junior, Gerald first bribed the man to double-cross me at the trial, and then, when I got wind of the bribe, killed him. Adams undoubtedly got that thousand dollar bill from the big-shot bookie he once defended. What I don't understand is why he took Frances Coleman into his office."

Hildegarde shrugged. "Probably so he could keep tabs on her, and possibly to set her up as the next logical suspect if by some miracle you got Junior off. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the private detective, Finch, approached Gerald with his wild proposition before he came to us. But you must admit now that we'd never have pinned anything on Gerald if he hadn't been forced out into the open and hadn't tried to kill you with that bottle spiked with seconal."

"I should have recognized him, but the room was dark. I just got the impression of a kindly old guy with whiskers and dark glasses," Malone admitted. "My eyes were on the bottle."

"If it had been an anonymous gift in the mail, it would have aroused suspicion," she pointed out. "But that was sheer talent—the man offering to trade the bottle for your lighter when you had no money. But he should have disposed of the lighter—what strange mistakes the cleverest men sometimes make . . ."

"The lighter is evidence; I'll probably never get it back," complained Malone. "Von Flanagan will keep it. Say, he let you down on one thing, though. He promised to have all the suspects tailed that night."

"The slip was mine," confessed Miss Withers. "By that time I was suspecting Adams, and plenty! But I hadn't communicated my suspicions to poor von Flanagan, or even to you. So his men watched only Finch and Frances Coleman and Zimmer—leaving Gerald Adams free. Von Flanagan never even considered Gerald as a suspect. And the man simply walked in and did his dirty work before the trap was even set! Yes, I goofed, Malone. In the words of the greatest detective of them all, if it should ever strike you that I am getting overconfident of my powers, kindly whisper 'Norbury'—I mean 'County Hospital'—in my ear."

"Well, everybody's satisfied, except Gerald Adams. Junior is out of prison, and I hear he and Frances are going on a second honeymoon."

"And what about you yourself and the lovely Helga Swenson?"

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Miss Withers was beaming with approval.

"She wanted to reform me," he said, a little sadly. Just then the waiter came closer, to ask if there would be anything else—a brandy or a liqueur perhaps?

"That will be *all*," said Miss Withers firmly.

And it was.

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EDITORS' NOTE: *The Withers-Malone short novel you have just read will be published in book form, with the five other Withers-Malone stories, in December 1963 as an Inner Sanctum Mystery (Simon and Schuster). The title of the forthcoming book is* PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE, *by Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice, with an Introduction by Ellery Queen.*

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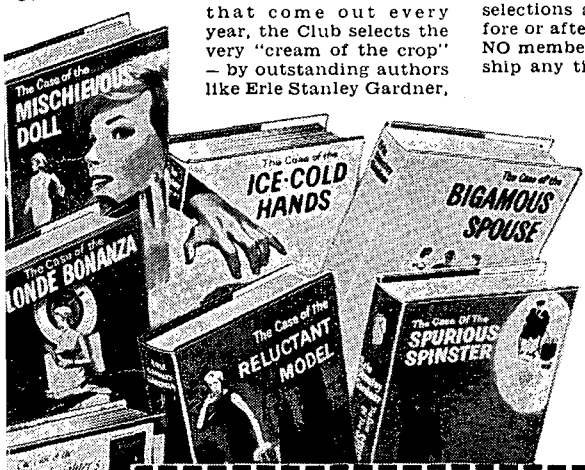
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